

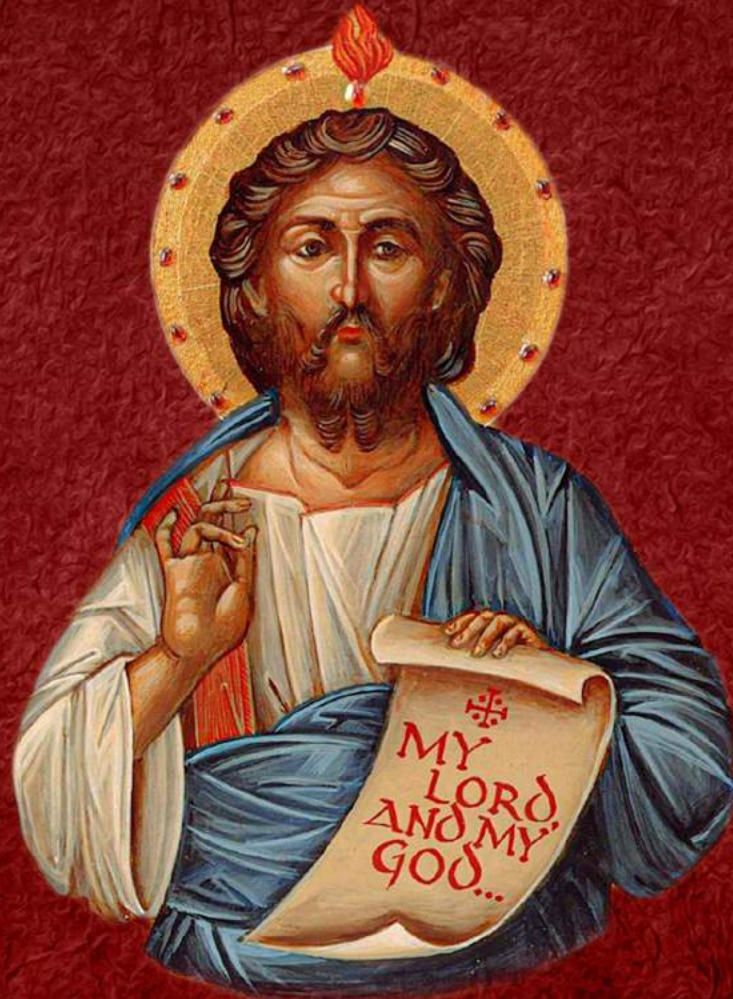
THE MALANKARA SABHA

ENGLISH QUARTERLY

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 3

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2023

ONLINE EDITION



St. Thomas, the faithful servant and disciple of Christ,
Filled with divine grace, cried out from the depth of his love:

You are my Lord and my God!

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The Malankara Sabha

ENGLISH QUARTERLY

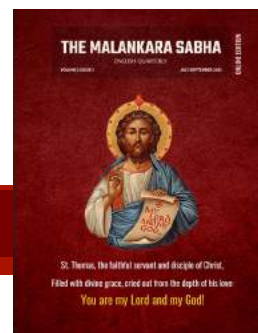
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JULY 3 - DUKRONO OF ST. THOMAS





His Holiness Writes...

As we commemorate the 1950th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Thomas, the Apostle of India, it is essential to recognize his profound legacy to the Malankara Church. St. Thomas holds a special place in the hearts of the faithful in the Malankara tradition, as he is the founder and the Patron Saint of the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church. The legacy of St. Thomas teaches us several essential lessons. First and foremost, he reminds us of the importance of faith. In a world filled with doubts and uncertainties, St. Thomas shows us that doubt can be a stepping stone to deeper belief and a stronger relationship with God. His unwavering commitment to seeking truth encourages us to confront our own doubts and find solace in the presence of Christ. Furthermore, St. Thomas exemplifies the power of mission and evangelization. He ventured into unfamiliar territories, encountering different cultures and languages, to bring the light of Christ to those who had not yet heard the Gospel. He faced numerous challenges, including persecution and martyrdom, yet he remained resolute in his commitment to Jesus Christ. Let us honor St. Thomas by upholding the values he imparted to the Malankara Church – a deep reverence for the Word of God, a commitment to prayer and worship, a spirit of unity and fellowship, and an unwavering dedication to spreading the Gospel to all people.

We are deeply concerned about the recent attacks on Christians and Christian institutions in Manipur. The inter-tribal hostilities in Manipur have extensively and adversely affected Christians in the region. Churches and Christian institutions have been ravaged and many are the Christians who have lost their lives as a result of this situation. As media reports say, “the devastating violence has seen 70 Christians killed, around 300 churches burned down, around 100 other Christian buildings (including a theological college) destroyed, and at least a thousand homes of Christians burned down”. We request the Central and State Government to take stringent action against those who are responsible for massive attacks on a particular community and support the rehabilitation and peaceful coexistence of all in the beautiful land

of Manipur. The Malankara Orthodox Church has already responded to this crisis by extending financial relief. Our North Indian Dioceses have extended support to the affected people and Priests from our Church have visited the State as part of Peace Delegations. However, all of us are bound to sympathetically support relief operations and rehabilitation and pray for the affected people.

Amidst all the disheartening situations around us, the survival story of four children at Amazon Forests has given us great relief. It was a tale of resilience, courage and the indomitable human spirit. It offers several valuable lessons that can inspire and enlighten us. Despite facing numerous challenges and obstacles, the children refused to give up. Their firm desire to survive teaches us the importance of resilience and the power of a determined mindset in the face of adversity. Their ability to adapt to unfamiliar and hostile conditions highlights the importance of being flexible and resourceful in the face of unexpected circumstances. They supported and relied on one another, pooling their strengths and skills to overcome challenges. This underscores the significance of collaboration and unity in achieving common goals. The children’s experience in the Amazon rainforest deepened their connection with nature. They had to observe, understand, and adapt to the natural environment around them to survive. They faced dangers, including encounters with wild animals and potential threats from the elements. Their bravery inspires us to confront our fears, step out of our comfort zones, and tackle challenges head-on. It reminds us that even in the most challenging and adverse situations, human beings possess the capacity to overcome and triumph. It serves as an inspiration for us to face our own challenges with strength, resilience, and a positive mindset.

BASELIOS MARTHOMA MATHEWS III

Catholicate Palace, Devalokam.

July 1st, 2023

Editorial

Even if the small finger, a tiny organ in a big body, which appears to be insignificant, is wounded, the pain will be felt all over and the whole body suffers. Likewise Manipur, which is comparatively a small State in India, is bleeding, causing pain even to those who live in the other parts of the country. The anguish and agony of the victims of the 'Manipur violence' which erupted in the first week of May 2023 and is still continuing, is beyond our imagination. Those who have taken the anesthesia of communalism and are well versed in the business of hatred, may have immunity against this pain.

More than hundred people belonging to both Kuki and Meitei communities in Manipur have reportedly been killed and hundreds of houses and churches burnt to ashes. A large number of people are said to have been displaced and internet access suspended.

The major brunt of the violence is borne by the Kukis who are predominantly Christians. Since majority of the Meitei community live in the Imphal Valley and the Kukis in the hills of Manipur, this conflict is depicted as a conflict of 'Valley versus Hill'. Due to the Manipur violence, some members of the Meitei community who used to live in the hills were forced to move to the valley and similarly some of the Kukis who had lived in the valley moved to the hills. Thus the separation of these two communities is now complete. Since both communities are militarized having a lot of weapons, the violence is unbridled and still continues.

Mainstream commentators seem to think that the Manipur violence was triggered by a single event - the Manipur High Court's April 19th verdict, directing the state government to make a decision on the issue of granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the majority Meitei community and the Kukis' marching in protest against it. Others say that this is not the entire case. The present Manipur government dismissed serious Kuki grievances for years and tried to 'other-ise' and marginalize them as outsiders and encroachers. Articles like that of Dr. Angshuman Choudhary titled '*Marginalization of Kukis, the main reason behind Manipur violence*' in Frontline (Online June 27, 2023) explain it in detail.

The question why the Prime Minister of India is maintaining a stoic silence about this, is not only raised by political leaders from the opposition parties, fearless learned

citizens of this country and some committed journalists, reporters and You-tubers, but by many people of both the Kuki and Meitei communities in Manipur also. Another million dollar question is why Manipur is not put under President's rule even after such horrifying and extreme violence over a long period of time?

What we very much miss today is the presence and advocacy of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi who used to give a healing touch to wounds of communal violence and undertake efforts to reconcile such warring communities through his fasting, spiritual presence and words of unity, peace, love and reconciliation.

Political leaders, military and police must exercise their duty sincerely and impartially to ensure restoration of peace in Manipur and other parts of the country. However, depending on them alone for peace is not adequate. Enlightened Gurus, spiritual leaders, women of the affected communities and dedicated journalists also must come forward to exercise their decisive role to curb the situation like that of Manipur and to enlighten the minds of the perpetrators and victims of violence towards justice and peace.

Every country especially a widely pluralist country like India is in need of a 'Unity and Reconciliation' Ministry at the National and State level having free access to the conflict zones with adequate security. The African country Rwanda which witnessed terrible violence between Hutus and Tutsis leading to the massacre of lakhs of people in 1994, has established a dynamic National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. *Ingando*, an ongoing program of Peace Education in solidarity camps is just one of the efforts of this commission for promoting harmony in Rwanda.

Hill and Valley are interdependent. Each one's identity and existence is linked to the other. No community is to be belittled, side-lined, exploited or robbed of their entitlements. What we need is the peace of '*a Community of Communities*'. 'Blessed are the Peace makers' (St. Matthew 5:9). Bridge makers in this hill-valley divide are indeed blessed ones.

Bijesh Philip Achen

Editor, The Malankara Sabha, English Quarterly



ICON TURNED ICONOGRAPHER IMAGE OF GOD AND HUMAN CREATIVITY: A THEOLOGICAL-AESTHETIC REFLECTION

Fr. Dr. K M. George

There is a growing feeling among many artists and all those associated with art that Artificial Intelligence (AI) constitutes a major threat to human creativity and that creative artists will soon be replaced. Some of the art works already produced by AI, seem to be more enchanting, sophisticated, quicker and cheaper than what had been created by human artists.

But there are those who believe that artificial intelligence is a new medium that can enhance human artistic creativity to an incredible level. Several different apps are now available for anyone to create amazing works of art. According to this view neither photography nor digital art can replace artists and artistic creativity as feared.

There is, therefore, nothing to be worried about AI, in fact it could be a great boon to the world of art.

We are all aware of the vigorous debate going on around the newcomer ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) introduced by OpenAI. Though it is still at the experimental level and is primarily concerned with language models, its potential for machine-learning goes beyond all our wildest imaginations. In fact, the newly emerging cyber technologies are taking over the traditional attributes given to God by religious people of all colours: all-knowing, all-powerful, all-seeing, all-doing and all-controlling. The conventional *Srishti-Sthithi-Samhara* functions are being taken over by AI, assisted by such angelic hosts like quantum computing, biotechnology, nano technology, robotics and so on. God is probably not dead, but quite unemployed, it seems!

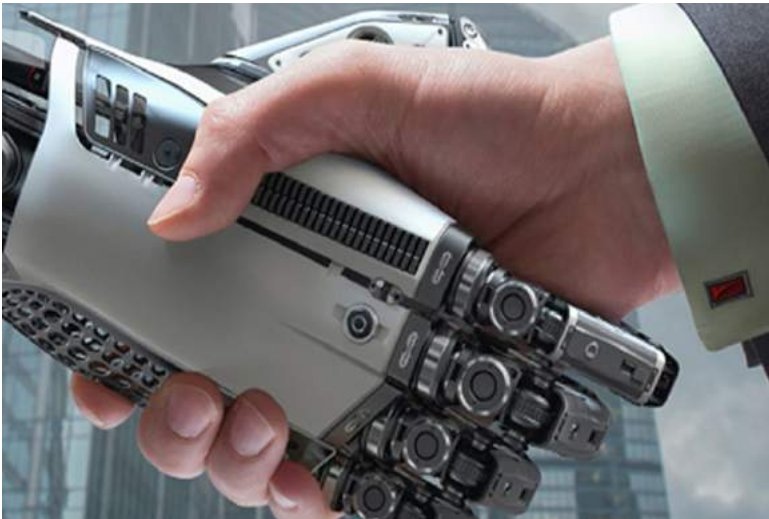
While we wait for more clarity about the emerging scenario, my modest purpose is to reflect briefly on the traditional *Christian* biblical understanding of the human person as created in God's image and likeness (*Imago Dei*) and its connection to human creativity, particularly in the domain of art in the context of the great transition now taking place in human self-understanding and civilization.

I take the words *icon* and *iconographer* (from Greek *eikon* =image, and *iconographer* = the one who 'writes' an icon) in a rather metaphorical sense. They are taken from the biblical image of the human person being created in God's image and likeness and the eastern Christian practice of Byzantine iconography. However, while we take *icon* as pre-eminently applied to the human person in the biblical sense, we may take all that God has created out of divine love and will as participating in the human icon. God as artist has granted freedom and creative imagination to God's own work, that is, the human person.

But God's work of art is not a passive and silent one like any painting we artists produce. That icon or art work of God is gifted with free will, power of reason (*logos*) and creativity. The human persons are also called to be co-creators or fellow workers with God (see 1Cor. 3:19). So they can will and imagine anything, strive to make and remake it, put it to good use or destructive purpose. Freedom includes the potential for its misuse as well.

By 'iconography' we mean metaphorically all this

work of continually exercising human freedom and creativity – writing or portraying the image, that is, the image of God granted to humanity, by extending it, disseminating it, researching it, experimenting with it, elaborating it and drawing applications from it. In this sense of icon making, our science and technology, our spiritual exercises, our religious rituals, our social and political systems, our science and technology, are all part of the iconographical process - the continuing act of painting the icon. Let us call it ‘holistic iconography’ for convenience.



In eastern Christian iconography they make a distinction between good icons and bad icons depending on the strict canons regulating the subject, the technique and the act of painting. For example, it is not permitted to portray God the Father in icon painting because the absolute conceptual ‘unknowability’ and ‘ineffability’ of the essential nature of God has to be respected. God is spirit and without form; and no one has seen God, according to the Scriptures. (One may contrast this with western Renaissance art, in Michelangelo for example, where God the Father is represented anthropomorphically as a majestic-looking grand old man with long beard and flowing robes). But Christ is represented in human form because in him God is incarnate as the “Son of Man”, and is historically revealed in such a way that human senses could perceive him and interact with him bodily. Holy Spirit is represented in images like the dove and tongues of fire as revealed in the Scriptures.

Exercising proper judgement over the extended

form of iconography, that is, discerning the true from the false, the good from the bad and the beautiful from the ugly in human creativity, is a necessary task laid on theology. Here I do not primarily mean systematic academic theology of the institutional church as taught in seminaries and theological schools, but God’s Economy (*Oikonomia*) of infinite love, compassion and forgiveness to human beings through Jesus Christ the incarnate Word of God.

Thus taking it in this sense, God created Adam and Eve to be in communion with God, to reflect God’s glory in the whole creation, and help the created order to participate in the glory, grace and love of God. This was the paradise experience. Adam, the Icon of God, the first human being, was given the responsibility and privilege to take care of the garden. That means Adam, or the human species, was entrusted with the care for all creation.

So in dealing with the created world, the human person (that is, Adam and Eve), as icons par excellence of the Creator God, and as iconographer-artist, has to assume the divine qualities of compassionate love and creative enhancing of all forms of life. Apparently God has not set any limit for the human icon’s iconographic imagination or creative activity. The very first commission of God for Adam to freely name all creatures in the garden of Eden shows the amazingly absolute degree of trust the original Artist-Creator put in the unique human Icon. (*‘Whatever Adam called every living creature, that was its name’,* Genesis 2:19-20). This exercise of freedom and creativity in naming everything in the Garden still continues in the complex process of creative human imagination, invention and interaction with reality. This is what we call *creative holistic iconography*. Its dimensions are virtually infinite since it is called to participate in God’s own creativity.

In fact, the descendants of Adam and Eve have to keep the same divine criteria for judging all that is created by human beings, from the construction of simple huts to sophisticated architecture, from using a stick as a tool to pluck fruits to the creation of nuclear missiles, from shepherding people to making a massive army and weaponry.

Some basic questions need to be raised with regard

to every creative act. Does it help life or destroy it? Does it promote justice and peace for all people? Does it foster the harmony between humans and their environment? Does it contribute to the common good?

As to beauty we may say that, what is true and good for all human beings, as well as for all living beings and the environment of life, is to be considered beautiful. Searching for beauty in isolated entities has no real meaning; it is to be recognized in the interconnectedness of all things. Only a true artist-iconographer can perceive and create abiding beauty in such a holistic manner. We may remember that at the deepest levels of particles or pulsations that constitute our material universe, truth and beauty emerge from their mutual connections and not from so-called individual particles that are really non-existent without connections.

One may think of an example like the Human Enhancement project in order to clarify what we said regarding the holistic nature of beauty and goodness. We are familiar with very useful modern forms of enhancing human bio-physical abilities like organ transplantation, chip implants and other augmenting devices. Technology is aiming at narrowing down mind-machine interface, genetic screening, elimination of all potential diseases already at the embryonic level, and creating cyborgs that will merge intelligent self-learning machines with living organisms. The overall goal of such Enhancement programmes is to create super humans who will live probably 200 years or even more. Death is to be finally eliminated according to this technological dream. A simple question is about the environment of such super human or post-human species. Can we also enhance our natural environment, prevent its death and decay in nature? Are we humans an isolatable species of beings?

In fact, the only limiting condition for our power of holistic iconography might be the impending geological-ecological cataclysm. Every major religion on earth has a picture of the final end of all life, apart from individual human death. Even a virus, a little more fatal than Corona, can usher in doomsday. There is no reason why Homo sapiens cannot become totally extinct like many other extinct species on earth. There is now a dramatic increase in contemporary literary references to the scenario of total human extinction compared to the

first part of the 20th century.

Conclusion

At this stage of radical transition we are unable to answer complex ethical, spiritual and aesthetic questions that might arise in our minds. One may, however, draw some tentative conclusions:

- The human person as *Icon* of God, individually and collectively, is endowed with freedom and creativity, and is called and authorised to be iconographer-artist to name and rename, shape and reshape, configure and reconfigure “the world that God so loved” in such a way that it always gets the ever refreshing sense of orientation and meaning.
- The human Icon turned Iconographer participates in God’s ongoing creative Energy, and engages in a holistic iconography, taking all elements in the universe in their vital interconnections as one Body, and reflecting God’s own compassionate love, all-inclusive care, foundational grace, inexhaustible goodness, infinite beauty and humble identification with creation as manifested in Jesus Christ.
- Although the human Icon is capable of infinite creativity, there are, however, limiting conditions like finite space and time, huge natural catastrophes and viral pandemics that may threaten the very existence of humans on earth. And in our digital age, malware viruses may instantly explode the cyber bubble (yes, it is still a bubble despite all its might) and reduce modern human technological civilization to square one.
- We need to exercise aesthetic discernment in the realm of our cosmic iconography, developing ways and means to judge our work of art, that is, all that human creativity produces. The transcendent roots of the human *Icon* and its spiritual qualities that motivate our ‘iconographical’ work alone can help us make the right judgment on all human creativity, from the art of painting to the creation of a post-human species.

(Rev. Fr. Dr. K. M. George, former principal of Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam and Director of Sopana Orthodox Academy, is a well-known Theologian and Artist. Article written on 7th March, 2023)



VIRGIN MARY MOTHER OF GOD: MARY MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros Metropolitan

The Orthodox Church honors and venerates the Virgin Mary as “more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim.” Her name is mentioned in every service, and her intercession before the throne of God is earnestly solicited. She is given the title of ‘Theotokos’ (Greek for ‘God bearer’), as well as ‘*Mother of God*’.

Remembering her in prayers, reflecting on her core values and exemplifying her virtues are significant components of Orthodox Spirituality and Faith. The place given to her in the Holy Qurbana and the Canonical prayers is unique and unparalleled. The Church has dedicated many festivals in honor of Virgin Mary. Some of the important festivals are: *Festival of Seeds* (15th January), *Festival of the Harvest* (15th May), *Annunciation* (25th March), *Veneration of the Mother* (26th December), and *Assumption* (15th August). The 15 day period before the feast of Assumption is a time of fasting and abstinence. Many of the faithful observe lent during the eight day period related to the birth of Virgin Mary (1- 8 September), even though it is not a canonical fast.

VIRGIN MARY, A GLIMPSE OF HER LIFE STORY

The most authentic and reliable descriptions of Virgin Mary are obtained from the Gospels. Even though many other ancient writings give many wonderful and miraculous accounts of Virgin Mary, the church feels it is important primarily to rely on facts from the Gospel.

According to “Jacob’s Gospel” an Apocryphal book, Mary was born to Joachim and Hannah, a noble and pious couple, who had no children for a long time. After much prayer and fasting Mary was born to them. Fulfilling their vow, Mary was presented at the Temple of Jerusalem and she grew up in the temple with other girls of her age. She was betrothed to Joseph in her 12th year under the patronage of the priests in the temple. All the miraculous incidents after her betrothal are narrated in the Gospels. Traditionally it is believed that Mary lived with her son Jesus Christ, but was later accepted in John’s house on the request of Jesus.

According to the writings of St. Jerome who lived in the fourth century, after the Ascension of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary lived and associated herself with the early church and participated wholeheartedly in Christ’s salvific ministry. During the final days of Virgin Mary in this world, the apostles came to Jerusalem from the various and distant places across the world where they were evangelizing. The disciples were able to witness Christ receiving the soul of Virgin Mary and taking it to Heaven. Another traditional belief of the Church is that her mortal remains were carried from the tomb in Gethsemane to Paradise.

VIRGIN MARY, HER PLACE IN THE CHURCH

The Church does not worship Virgin Mary. The Church renders Adoration and Worship only to God.

The Orthodox Church understands and worships the merciful Triune God, Creator of all living and non-living things, who has no beginning or end. This truth is very clear in all the prayers repeated daily and is manifest in the Apostle's creed. The church prayerfully venerates Virgin Mary and the saints. This veneration is not in contradiction to the worship of the One True God. Nobody, not even the illiterate, consider the Saints as Gods, or even worship Mary as God or Goddess.

Virgin Mary is placed first among the saints.

Praised by all the earth, blessed, second heaven, pure hearted and unblemished, higher and nobler than the hosts of seraphim and cherubim and the angels, are some of the titles or distinctions that the church adorns her with. Above all, the titles “*Ever Virgin*” and “*Mother of God*” (Theotokos in Greek), are the names that render her extremely divine and noble. These two names are inextricably related to the mysteries of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the fullness of time, the Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Creator and Loving God, was born of Virgin Mary, to redeem all creation. The Church calls Mary “*Ever Virgin*” as the birth took place miraculously, without any physical relationship with man. The Church calls her the ‘*Mother of God*’ or ‘*Theotokos*’ (God-bearer) because the Church firmly believes that Mary gave birth to the incarnated God who is at the same time both perfect God and perfect Man, with one nature. It doesn't mean that Mary existed before God or from ages, but it indicates the truth of the incarnation of God.

CONTROVERSIES AND EXPLANATIONS

Protestants teach that Virgin Mary does not have a place of prominence or distinction in the church. They are of the opinion that just as eggshells are of no use after eggs are hatched and chicks are produced, so also, Virgin Mary has no significance after she gave birth to Jesus. (This is equivalent to saying that there is no relationship between the child and the mother after birth). The biblical evidences that they set forth are as follows:



1. Luke 2:7 “She gave birth to her first born son”. As the word ‘first born’ is mentioned, they claim that Mary had other children after Jesus was born.

Counterpoint: The answer to this is in the Bible. There are many references in the Bible that mention the “first born”. In all these references the word “first born” indicates that the child is the first to be born from the mother’s womb, which may or may not be followed by the birth of other siblings. For example in Exodus 13:2, even before the establishment of Aaron’s priesthood, Yahweh

commands: “Dedicate all the first born males to me, for every first born male Israelite and every first-born male animal belongs to me”. It is said that when the first child is born, even if it is not followed by the birth of another child, the first born has to be dedicated to the Lord. The parents would not wait for a second child to be born, before dedicating their first born. The first born is the first conception of the womb. There may or may not be children after that.

In Numbers 18: 13-17 Yahweh commands the priest Aaron: “*Whatever the Israelites bring for Yahweh from their country, shall be yours. Every member of your family who is ritually clean may eat it.*

Everything in Israel that is unconditionally dedicated to me belongs to you. Every first born child or animal that the Israelites present to me belongs to you. But you must accept payment to buy back every first born child and must also accept payment for every first born animal that is ritually unclean. Children will be brought back at the age of one month for the fixed price of five pieces of silver according to the official standard. But the first born of cows, sheep, and goats are not to be bought back, they are completely to me and are to be sacrificed. Throw their blood against the altar and burn their fat as a food-offering, a smell pleasant to me”.

Here also it is commanded that the first born should be offered to God, as it is the first to be born of that womb. Whether another is born later of that womb or not, is not at all a matter of relevance. Therefore it is

Therefore the argument that whenever the term 'first born' is used, it is because there is a second child, isn't right.

difficult to agree with the theory that just because Jesus was referred to as the first born of Mary, it follows, that Mary had given birth to more children. St. Jerome, the Church father says: “The only child is always the first born, but all first-borns are not the only children.” Therefore the term ‘first born’ need not mean that other children were born later, but should be understood to mean that no other child was delivered of the mother’s womb before the birth of this child.

Jesus Christ is the firstborn of Virgin Mary. 40 days after his birth, Virgin Mary and Joseph offered a sacrifice to God (Luke 2: 22-24). The formalities laid down by Law were carried out even in the case of Jesus. Therefore the argument that whenever the term ‘first born’ is used, it is because there is a second child, isn’t right. Jesus Christ is the first born and the only son.

2. As the terms “Your wife”, “Woman” are used while referring to Mary, they argue that she is not a virgin. (Mathew 1:20, 1:24)

Counter Point: According to the Israeli tradition, after betrothal, a girl was referred to as wife, woman and so on.

Let us examine the interpretation of the *Proclamation of the Angels* by 4th Century Church father, St. Ivanios, the golden tongued, ‘O Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid of joining your wife Mary. She has conceived by the Holy Spirit. (Mathew 1:20). Here the angel (Gabriel) refers to the Virgin who is betrothed as “wife”, because in the Jewish tradition an engaged couple were referred to as husband and wife, even before their wedding. *Join her*, actually meant ‘Invite her to your house and keep her safe. God has entrusted her to you. It is not for marriage, but to be a support to her.’ It is on the same lines that Jesus entrusted His mother to His beloved disciple who was standing at the foot of the cross saying ‘This is your Mother’.

Other Biblical references wherein the terms *Wife* and *woman* are used for girls engaged to be married are seen in Deuteronomy 22: 23-24 and Deuteronomy 20:7. In all Biblical texts where references are made to *wife* and *woman* it need not necessarily mean that it refers to married women only. In fact it is only to indicate womanhood. When Eve was created she was named woman to reveal her creation and womanhood. Similarly the term *wife* is used for Mary only to indicate her status as a maiden engaged to be married.

Luke 2:4-5 says: ‘So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.’

Here one should note another fact that even after Mary gave birth to Jesus; the angel does not refer to Mary as wife. In Mathew 2:13 we see: “An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill Him. So get up, take the child and the mother and escape to Egypt and stay there until I tell you to leave’.” Even when Joseph prepared to return from Egypt, the angel said: “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead”. (Mathew 2:21)

Mary was referred to as wife, after Jesus was conceived in her womb and before he was born. This was because Virgin Mary was not the wife of any man. But, she might have been called wife, or society would have condemned and stoned a pregnant Mary her for adultery. However after the birth of Jesus they are referred to as **mother and child**. Therefore the mere use of the term ‘wife’ does not mean that she was actually his wife and had other children.

(H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros, President, Malankara Sabha, is currently serving as Metropolitan of Kottayam Diocese. His Grace was formerly Bishop of Madras Diocese from 2009 -2022. This article is an excerpt from his book Melezhuth on Orthodox Tradition and Spirituality.)

Editorial Note: Part I concludes here. Part II dealing with interesting interpretations and more information on the importance of Virgin Mary in the Orthodox Tradition will be published in the next Quarterly.



THOSE WHO ARE ‘AROUND’ JESUS

Fr. Dr. Jogy C. George

What is the criterion for genuine Christian discipleship? Is it only reserved for an elected few? Is there a hierarchical order? Is it open for all, regardless of gender, class and denomination?

Unlike St. Mathew and St. Luke, the gospel of Mark seems to be more inclusive in its language and approach. The very same incidents in the other two gospels are presented in St. Mark in a much more subtle and symbolic way to make the message of the gospel more inclusive. This brief article is a humble attempt to highlight one of those sections which deals with discipleship. The passage (Mk 3:13-19) under consideration begins with the constitution of the twelve and ends with the exclusive sharing of the mysteries of the kingdom with those who are ‘around’ Jesus Christ along with the chosen twelve.

In Mk 3:13-19 Jesus constitutes the disciples and the disciples respond well to this call (3:13, ‘he called...and they came’, a reciprocal action; cf. 1:20). And the purposes of this call are to ‘be with him’ (cf. 2:19; 3:7), to ‘send them to proclaim’ and to ‘have authority to expel the demons’ (3:14-15). In the first call of the disciples (1:16-20; cf. 2:14) the purpose was to ‘follow’ him, but now it is to be ‘with him’ and to be sent ‘to proclaim’ with ‘authority’. Therefore,

we notice an obvious development (from the first ‘call,’ 1:16ff to the second, 3:13ff) in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, and of course, in discipleship.

In 3:20-35 there are two incidents that occur in a house that Jesus and his disciples visit. In the first incident (3:20-30), the family of Jesus comes to take charge of him, hearing that ‘he is out of his mind’. The tension is augmented with the coming of scribes from Jerusalem, who said Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul. (3:21-22). Both are people from two different sections of society who are supposed to understand Jesus better than anyone else; one is his family or relatives (the personal level) and the second, is the scribes from Jerusalem (from the temple, religious level). But ironically, they did not understand him. And in the second scene (3:31-35) which happens in the same background (house), the personal level is further intensified: it is Jesus’ mother and his brothers.

Jesus was informed about their arrival by the ‘crowd sitting around him’ (3:32). And Jesus looking at those who sat ‘around him’ (3:32-34) makes this decisive pronouncement that, ‘*whoever does the will of God are my brother and sister and mother*’ (3:35). Notably, in Mark, it is the ‘crowd sitting around him’ who told him about the



arrival of his mother and brothers and Jesus replied to them (to the ‘crowd sitting around him’). But in Matthew it is ‘someone’ who told him about their arrival and the objects of his explanation are the disciples. (*Jesus answered him ‘Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Pointing to his disciples he said, ‘Here are my mother and brothers. Whoever does the will of my father in heaven, is my brother and sister and mother.’* Matt 12:47-50). In Luke (8:20-21) the whole procedure is impersonal.

Since the whole incident happens in the background of a house, the message is clearly conveyed to us – to be a part of the ‘family’ of Jesus (Mother and brothers) or to be outwardly religious (scribes from Jerusalem) is not the criterion to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The one who is *personal* to Jesus is the one who ‘*does the will of God*’. It is the crowd (constantly ‘*gathering around*’ him 3:20.32.34; cf. 2:13), and the disciples (*following* him 1:16-20; 2:14-15), not the one that is interrupting him (3:21) and criticizing him (3:22). This becomes much more obvious in the following scene.

In the following chapter, we see Jesus teaching the disciples and the crowd, in parables (4:1ff). It was the parable of the Sower. Jesus ends the first stage of his interpretation of the parable in 4:9, with these words. “*And he said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear’*” After this, when he was alone, those who were ‘around him’ along with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. And to them, those who were ‘around him’, Jesus said “*To you*

has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables” (4:10-11). And following these words, Jesus explains to them the inner meaning of the parable. Jesus, here, is making a clear distinction between those who are ‘around him’ and those who are ‘outside.’ This is not only a distinction based on the spatial nearness but based on their relationship to God the Father (cf. 3:35) and Jesus himself (1:16-20; cf. 3:13-14). If it is used only in a spatial sense, it would undermine the pronouncement of Jesus that, ‘to you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God’ (4:11, also cf. 3:35).

Being a member of a certain denomination or being outwardly religious will not make us a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is the one ‘who does the will of God’ that is counted as a disciple. Spatial nearness to the Church will not guarantee us a place in the kingdom, but grafting our will towards the will of God is important.

A careful reader can identify this in the previous declaration made by Jesus looking at those who sat ‘around him’ (3:32.34) that ‘whoever does the will of God (3:35) are his mother and brother and sister. Hence, Jesus’ intention to impart ‘the mystery of the Kingdom of God’ to them (4:11) is not without reason.

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WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND?

Jiji Thomson IAS

The world is limping back to normalcy after the Covid-19 pandemic. Two years ago, when the pandemic was at its peak, we were all worried. We were mortally scared of the virus and its effects on our socio-economic life. Old people were left unattended in their homes. One of the members of a Catholic Church in Trivandrum committed suicide out of sheer frustration. The vicar of the church requested me to talk to the senior members of the parish and instill some hope in them. I agreed. When I visited them, one of them asked: "Why is this happening to us? Where's God at this point of crisis?"

This is the question Gideon asked thousands of years ago. Ever since then, we have been repeating this question. In the book of Judges, we see how the children of Israel who did evil in the sight of the Lord, were delivered into the land of Midian for seven years. When the oppression continued, the Israelites were crestfallen. They cried out to the Lord for help. That was the time when the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and greeted him: "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valour". Gideon, like many other Israelites, had heard stories of God's power but never had seen it happen in front of his eyes. Naturally, he was sceptical and asked, somewhat sarcastically: "If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened? And where are all the miracles which our fathers recounted to us?"

When we undergo hardships, we, too, think that God has forsaken us. We feel discouraged.

Moses, a young prince, had to wander in the desert for

forty years before he was entrusted with a mighty mission by the Lord! Elijah became so desperate that he cried out, "O Lord! Take away my life, for I am no better than my father!"; Joseph was in prison for twelve years before the Lord delivered him. God has His plans. He has his timetable. Unfortunately, He never shares his diary with us! He may delay but will never deny! While we may not understand the logic behind our struggles, we know that God makes us suffer to increase our dependence on Him!

Please refer to St. Matthew 6:25-34. Here are two main things that Jesus teaches us in this passage. First, he tells us not to worry. Second, he asks us to seek the kingdom of God first. He doesn't just give us the negative, he gives us the positive also.

FIRST: JESUS SAYS, 'DO NOT BE ANXIOUS'

He says it three times in this passage—do not be anxious. But did you catch the word that comes right before each time he says it? Verse 25—Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious. Verse 31—Therefore, do not be anxious. And Verse 34—Therefore, do not be anxious. Now, you see what this means? It means a Christian's peace is always meant to be a rational peace. It means we don't have to somehow dig deep and muster it ourselves. It means that we're meant to know something that logically and spiritually removes anxiety.

2 - What's the reason for our peace? It's the truth that, in Christ, God is our loving heavenly Father. This is what chapter 6 is all about. It's all about the Father. Starting at the very beginning, Jesus tells us of the Father who sees. And then when he comes to prayer, we're told of the Father who knows and who hears. And now here, we're told that God is our Father who cares and who provides. This is the background that Jesus wants us to remember and be reawakened to. But unfortunately, in times like this, whenever God is brought into the conversation the only question that people seem to ask is... Where is God?

One of the questions that I always start getting in times like this is, "Where is God?" I understand and deeply sympathize with the question, I do. But I need to ask why it is only in the hard times that we tend to ask this question. When the sun is shining, times are good, life is comfortable, our team is winning, and our health is strong, why aren't we plagued in those moments with

the question, “Where is God?”

Well, the Bible tells us that it is because sin blinds us from the background of God’s goodness. So, when times are good, we tend to ignore God, but when times are bad we tend to blame God. Sin blinds us from the background of God’s loving care that He gives us every day—in the day of prosperity and in the day of adversity. Where is God? Well, let me ask you . . . Where was Jesus? Remember Jesus said, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” So, where was Jesus? In John 2 we find him in Cana making wine at a wedding. But then in John 11, we find him in Bethany shedding tears at a funeral. Where is Jesus? He’s at the wedding and the funeral. And if you’ve seen Jesus, you’ve seen God. So, where is God?

3 - He’s at the wedding and the funeral. God is there on our good days and our bad days. Because He is the God of Good Friday and the God of Easter Sunday. He is God in the light and God in the dark. Where is God? God is with us. He’s in both places—He’s in all places. That’s what David the Psalmist testifies to in Psalm 139. He is carefully and sovereignly in control of it all. He is our ever-present help in times of need. That’s the background! So, the problem isn’t with God, the problem is with us. The problem, Jesus says, is that we forget the true background of life. Sin blinds us from the background of God’s goodness in life, but, thankfully, Jesus can open the eyes of the blind! This is the background that Jesus is calling our hearts to see with the eyes of faith.

SECOND: ‘SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM’

Second, he asks us to seek the kingdom of God. What does this mean? And how do we do it practically? Well before we try to answer that, I want you to see the helpful connection that Jesus makes for us here. In verse 32, Jesus connects our anxiety with our seeking. Watch this, he says, “The Gentiles” – (which was the short form in their day for people who didn’t know God)— ‘are the ones seeking after all of these things: Health, wealth, and material possessions’—the physical, tactile things of life. That’s all they want and that’s all they talk about. And that’s why they’re anxious about it. Do you see the principle? Our anxieties reveal our priorities. We get anxious about the things we put our hope in. That’s why earlier in this chapter Jesus says ‘where your treasure is, your heart will be also’. In other words, what you’re hoping

in, what you’re investing in, that’s what’s going to have a firm grip on your heart. So, what does Jesus do? Again, he calls the background into consideration, and he says, let me give you something else to seek after. It’s almost like he says, “You want to be anxious for something? Be anxious about this. Do you want to seek something? Seek this! Seek first the kingdom of God.”

But what does that mean? Well, he already told us. In verse 20 he says, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Invest in eternal things. Don’t put your ultimate hope in this life, put it in the next life. But how do we do that? Well, elsewhere in this sermon he tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves, to go the extra mile, and to turn the other cheek.

4 - So, seeking first the kingdom of God involves two main things: remembering our hope of heaven and radically demonstrating the love of Christ in the here and now. Do you see how this works? The great security of our hope in heaven frees us to demonstrate the love of Christ here. Please remember that the early Christians took these words to heart, lived them out, and radically changed the world. This is what prompted Parumala Thirumeni and Pampadi Thirumeni to risk their lives while visiting the poor and sick during different plagues and epidemics.

We need to remember that Jesus always lived with the background in view. Every day of his life he had a serene attitude of peace and sacrificial actions of love. Even there on the cross, we see him loving his enemies and saying, “Father into your hands I commit my spirit.” The very things that God requires of us, Jesus has already fulfilled for us—for all those who put their faith in him. We are not saved by our peace and love; we are saved by His.

Dear Readers, in this fragile and fallen world, we as Christians, are called to bear witness to the kingdom of Christ. This is our role. This is the role of our church. May the Lord lead us in how to do that in creative and helpful ways in the days to come.

(Shri. Jiji Thomson IAS is Former Chief Secretary, Kerala)

The Living Temple of God

Dn. Roby Antony

When we think about the word “temple,” we often associate it with a place of worship. Additionally, we think of a building, something motionless or inanimate. However, to an Orthodox Christian, the word “temple” goes far beyond a stationary, lifeless building. The Temple of God is where God dwells; it is an abode for the presence of God. This article will illustrate how we are Temples of God and our vital role in being a Temple of God today.

During the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the candidate seeking to be a new member of the Church is signed and sealed with Holy Chrism (Mooron). Holy Chrism, through the sign of a Cross, serves as the acceptance of Christ and a deterrent to evil. Saint John Chrysostom says, “In this way does God hold in check all the frenzy of the evil one; for the devil will not dare to look upon such a sight. Just as if he had held the rays of the sun and had leaped away, so will his eyes be blinded by the sign of your face, and he will depart; for through Chrism, the Cross is stamped upon you.”ⁱ The Cross is a sign of victory over death; all evil forces shudder at this sign. When the candidate is anointed with Chrism, the Priest says, “Grant O Lord, that he may be spiritually filled with the sweet fragrance through this Chrism, that he may become free from the rule of the hostile powers and may not be afraid of the evil powers and the rulers of darkness. Let him walk in Your light so that he may become the son of Light and may follow and reach Your Holy Presence.” Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, Holy Chrism allows the newly baptized to reach the Holy Presence of God.

In the Malankara Orthodox Tradition, Chrism is used to anoint the Holy presence of God. Typically, when we think of Holy Chrism, we associate it only with Holy

Baptism. However, Baptism is not the only Sacrament in which Chrism is used. It is used in the Consecration of a Church as well. When one is baptized, he or she is anointed with Chrism through the sign of a Cross, just like a newly Consecrated Church. Thus, when a person is baptized and chrismated, a new Church is established in the world.

The Church serves as an abode for the presence of God and thwarts the presence of evil. The Church stands as a reminder of the true light of Christ in a world of darkness, a gleam of light in the darkness of the world. We may ask: “How can we see God’s presence in the Church?” After the consecration of a building with Holy Chrism (Mooron), it fully functions as a Church. Once the consecration of a Church has concluded, the first act is to offer the Body and Blood of Christ through Holy Qurbana. The Divine Liturgy is where we, Orthodox Christians, encounter

God. This is where we “taste and see that the Lord is good.”ⁱⁱ We encounter God during the Holy Qurbana. We see the Body and Blood of Christ placed on the Altar during the Divine Liturgy. The Church is where we see Christ sitting on his throne or thronos (Altar), as a direct reflection of Christ sitting on His throne in heaven. Whenever we enter the Church, we are coming before the throne of God, and Christ meets us. He fills us with light and healing. God’s presence fills the Church’s building through the Consecration of the Church through Holy Mooron and the celebration of the Holy Qurbana. As the Church serves as an abode for God’s presence,

so must baptized Orthodox Christians. In a Church, the Body and Blood of Christ are laid in the Chalice and Paten, which are placed on the Altar. Thus, we can say that Christ sits on the Altar or His throne. We, too, can serve as a house of God through participation in Holy Qurbana. When we consume the Divine Mysteries, the Body and Blood of Christ sit on the altar of our hearts. We, too, become a Temple of God, and the presence of God fills us up if we allow it to. However, to do this, we must live a life oriented to Christ, as the purpose of the



Church is to orient the world back to Christ.

Do Not Turn Back

In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, we decide not to return to a life of sin. In the Baptism service, the Epistle read is from Saint Paul to the Romans, which states, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”ⁱⁱⁱ This same question is posed to us. We die to sin when we die with Christ during Baptism. Therefore, we decide to no longer walk down the path of sin. We have agreed to be Temples of God. Always in our lives, there will be a battle between being Christ-like and being sinful. Every moment in our daily lives, we will encounter numerous situations where we must turn away from sin and live Christ-centered lives.

Like a Temple of God, we must be re-oriented to Christ. Saint Paul said, “We were buried with Him through Baptism into death; that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life.”^{iv} As a Temple of God, we have decided to turn away from sin and move towards God. To be oriented towards Christ, we must participate in the Holy Sacraments, which include Holy Confession and the Holy Eucharist. Through the Holy Sacraments, Christ is in us. Saint Paul told the Corinthians that our bodies are members of Christ.

As the Church serves as an abode for the presence of God, so too can our bodies act as a Church in which people can feel the presence of God; if we choose to do so. If we decide to turn away from a life of sin to a life of holiness, we, too, can be abodes for the presence of God. Thus, others can experience the presence of God through us. This does not replace the need to participate in Holy Sacraments, but this gives us the responsibility to carry Christ in our hearts throughout the world.

An Abode for the Presence of God

As Temples of God, God should dwell within us. After we consume the Divine Mysteries, Christ sits in our hearts if there is space. In the world we live in today, many things capture our attention and can lead us to forget God. Think of our hearts as a container. By giving our attention and time, we fill our hearts with many things, such as television, social media, sports, video games, dancing, entertainment, fashion, and other hobbies. These

may not be sinful in small doses, but we must ensure they are oriented to Christ so that our attention remains on God. Also, if our container or our hearts are full of these hobbies, there will be no space for Christ. Usually, our lives are so busy with many hobbies on top of careers or education that our containers (hearts) become full. Of course, this leaves no more room for our spiritual lives – Christ.

For this reason, we leave Christ out of our lives. To remedy a lack of orientation to Christ, we must empty the container of our hearts. After emptying the container of our hearts, we begin with Christ. It is after we put Christ in our hearts that we start placing other things. The main difference is that every hobby, interest, or activity must be oriented to Christ before placing it in our hearts. Saint Paul prays for the Ephesians by saying, “that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”^v This way, all things that have our attention are rooted in Christ.

If our hearts are rooted in Christ, our words and actions will preach the Gospel. Every moment in our lives, we come in contact with people, whether at home, school, the park, the mall, or even on the street. As Orthodox Christians, when people interact with us, they should feel like they are in the presence of God, the Living Temple of God. The inviting and loving nature of the Church should cross over to us. People should feel the presence of God when they interact with us! It will create the opportunity for others to be inspired by Christ and dedicate their lives to Him. However, first, we must realize that we are Living Temples of God and begin to orient ourselves to Christ.

(Rev. Dn. Roby Antony, is a member of St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, Cherry Lane, NY; and Spiritual Adviser of Talmeedo Men’s Ministry)

End notes:

ⁱ Saint John Chrysostom as quoted by Father Baby Varghese, Baptism and Chrismation in the Syriac Tradition, (Kottayam, Malankara Orthodox Church Publication, 2016), 60.

ⁱⁱ Orthodox Study Bible (Thomas Nelson, NKJV), Psalm 34:8.

ⁱⁱⁱ Orthodox Study Bible, Romans 6:1.

^{iv} Orthodox Study Bible, Romans 6:4.

^v Orthodox Study Bible Ephesians 3:16-17



The St. Thomas Consciousness of the Malankara Nazranis

Dr. Meledath Kurian Thomas

Throughout the centuries, the binding force that kept the *Nazranis* together in a homogenous group, was their deep adherence and faithfulness to their founder, St. Thomas the Apostle. The social formation of the first millennium CE and the East Syrian connection that was later developed did not in any way deteriorate it. In fact the connection with the East Syrian Church further enhanced the meaning of the title because that Church too held the heritage of St. Thomas on similar lines. The connection has also brought the second century CE Syriac book *Acta Thoma* of Bardaisan of Edessa, an epic describing the missionary journey of St. Thomas along with his martyrdom.

By the early second millennium CE, the St. Thomas consciousness was so entrenched that it made Friar Jordan of Toulouse, a French Dominican who visited India in 1302 CE, to describe the *Nazranis* as ... *they believe Saint Thomas the Great to be Christ*. Even if it is an exaggeration,

the Persian primates to the *Nazranis* bore the title as... *The Bishop Metropolitan, Superintendent and the Ruler of the See of the Holy Apostle Mar Thomas* in 1301 CE. According to Dr. Hermann Gundert, they (*Nazranis*) informed the Portuguese in their first meeting that their main feast was that of St. Thomas in the month of July.

Without a geographical identity and deprived of any denominational orientation, the *Nazranis* were referred to as the *Christians of St. Thomas* in the medieval period. It indicates that their St. Thomas consciousness was far beyond any other attributed or imposed identities.

When the confrontations with the Portuguese Roman Catholics in the sixteenth century intensified, the *Nazranis* were forced to elucidate their identity precisely. When it became indispensable to extricate them from the Christianity introduced by the Roman Catholics, the *Nazranis* picked the terminology, '*the way and lineage of St. Thomas*', to express their self-identity.

The term *lineage* in this identity formula may be an expression of their Jewish origin or mere pride of nobility. But the cumulative manifestation about their life as *the way of St. Thomas* was far beyond the perception of the European Roman Catholics. It declares about nothing in specific, yet covered integrally everything that they have practiced as Christians, religiously and socially and it reflected the idea that they are concerned to explain *the way of St. Thomas* without any adjectives, as to the reverence to their founder.

This inherited *St. Thomas consciousness* was too tough for the Roman Catholics to accept. They had nothing to counter it since it was so comprehensive than whatever they have experienced ever. The *Nazranis* treated their Indian nationality and culture as part of their *way of St. Thomas*. For *Nazranis*, St. Thomas was the symbol of their nationality and this made St. Peter, the apostle, an alien. It even made them to physically choreograph a drama in which St. Thomas complains on the invasion of St. Peter into his territory during the loftiness of the Roman Catholic incursion in the late sixteenth century CE. The Roman Catholics only had a vain attempt on hand to counter this which was to state that *the way of St. Thomas* is but one and the same as *the way of St. Peter*, the description the *Nazranis* had given to the Roman Catholic Christianity, but the *Nazranis* refused to accept this. With no other weaponry at hand, the Roman Catholics clearly pronounced excommunication at the Synod of Udayamperoor of 1599 CE to those trying to bring in any distinguishing notion of *the way of St. Thomas* from *the way of St. Peter*.

While establishing an indigenous bishopric after the declaration of independence from the Roman Catholic regime of fifty four years by the *oath of Coonen Cross* in 1653 CE, the *Nazranis* carefully chose *Mar Thoma*, St. Thomas, as the Episcopal identity tag. It was not a mere accident to choose this title since at least three of the nine successive *Mar Thoma* bishops from 1653 to 1815 CE had confirmed baptismal names other than Thomas. The deep rooted *St. Thomas consciousness* of the *Nazranis* even after the Roman Catholic regime and their systematic propaganda against it, motivated the *Nazranis* to declare their pleasure in the *St. Thomas consciousness* by labelling their primate as *Mar Thoma*.



In the dusk of the eighteenth century CE, the primate of the *Nazranis* was elevated as Metropolitan. Consequently, due to the shift to the West Syrian liturgical tradition, their Episcopal name was also altered as *Mar Dionysius* to conform to that format. However this did not suppress the *St. Thomas consciousness* of the *Nazranis*. It is found in the nineteenth century CE that *Mar Dionysius* Metropolitans were occupying the *throne of St. Thomas* and discharging their pontifical duties to the *See of St. Thomas*. Even the West Syrian bishops in India then acknowledged this by proclaiming themselves as sitting on the *apostolic throne of St. Thomas* while allegedly claiming the office of the Malankara Metropolitan.

In 1912 CE, The Catholicate was established in India on the *apostolic throne of St. Thomas*. The Church constitution of 1934 CE also confirms this. Even though the offices of the Catholicos of the East and the Malankara Metropolitan are now vested in the same person at the same time, both the offices hail the apostolic succession of St. Thomas. Even today *St. Thomas consciousness* is not just an ideology, but a part of the life of the *Nazranis*. The present day head of the Church referred to as the Catholicos of the East and the Malankara Metropolitan invariably holds the title, "Marthoma" in their conferred name.

(Dr. M. Kurian Thomas is a reputed historian and a prolific author. He has published numerous books about the heritage of Indian Christianity especially of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Currently he is serving as the general editor of 'Paithrukam Malankara Sabha Sahithe Sarani' and as visiting faculty member of St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary, Nagpur.)



GLOBAL CLERGY CONFERENCE

“Ambassadors of Christ: Ministers of Reconciliation and Righteousness”

Parumala Seminary

23-25 May 2023

Fr. Dr. Ninan V George

St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sanghom organised a Global Clergy Conference at Parumala Seminary from 23-25 May 2023. The meeting was blessed by the gracious presence of H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, along with H.G. Dr. Mathews Mar Thimothios (President, STOVs) who presided over the meeting. Other Metropolitan Bishops and over 1000 priests of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church from India and across the world, attended the conference. The theme for this conference was: “Ambassadors of Christ: Ministers of Reconciliation and Righteousness”, based on 2 Corinthians 5: 20, 21.

The meeting was inaugurated by H.H. the Catholicos, following which the keynote address was rendered by Dr. Ciza Thomas (Former Vice Chancellor, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Technological University). A comprehensive exploration of the theme was led by Rev. Fr. Dr. Jacob Kurian (former Principal, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam). Various facets of the theme were unveiled by H.G. Dr. Abraham Mar Seraphim, H.G. Zachariah Mar Severios and Fr. Dr. Reji Mathews (Principal, Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam). A Directory, comprising details of all members of the clergy across the globe, was released by H.G. Kuriakose Mar Clemis; and H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos (Secretary- Holy Synod) released the theme literature. Rev. Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese (Priest Trustee) and Very Rev. K.V. Paul Ramban (Manager-Parumala Seminary) felicitated the gathering on the occasion. Retreat sessions were led by H.G. Dr. Yakoob

Mar Irenaios, H.G. Yakob Mar Elias and H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Theodoros.

In addition to delving deeper into the theme itself, a variety of programmes, such as providing the latest guidance in accounting practices led by Mr. Ronny Varghese (Lay trustee); a talk on health and well-being from medical professionals; refreshing liturgical practices by Rev. Fr. Dr. M P. George; a seminar on reformulating mission work and an open forum to address spiritual and administrative parish concerns were organized. Lay perspectives on Pastoral ministry were presented by Mr. Alexander Daniel (IPS) and Mrs. Rema Alex. The priest-delegates were divided into 10 different groups to conduct group discussions and the topics for these discussions were formulated from the questions raised at various zonal level clergy meetings. All the individual programs had specific leaders who had relevant expertise in the topics. After each program, the delegates had time dedicated for reflection, which allowed them to comprehend and assimilate everything that was brought to the fore during the program.

On the final day, Holy Eucharist was celebrated by H.H. the Catholicos, in the presence of other Metropolitan

Bishops and all the delegates. The theme was then wrapped up by Rev. Fr. Dr. Jossi Jacob (Principal, STOTS, Nagpur). Subsequently, the retired members of the clergy, as well as priests with notable achievements were honored. Dr. Biju Jacob (IA&AS, Principal Accountant General, Kerala) gave the keynote address and H.H. the Catholicos rendered the valedictory message. Rev. Fr. Dr. T J Joshua and Adv. Biju Oommen, Malankara Association Secretary, extended felicitations. Fr. Dr. Ninan V. George, Secretary, Vaidika Sanghom proposed the Vote of Thanks. The meeting formally drew to a close with prayer and benediction.

The delegates left the meeting with a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to being ambassadors of Christ; promoting reconciliation and righteousness within the Malankara Orthodox Church and society at large. They recognized the significance of their pastoral care, spiritual guidance, and active engagement in pursuing social justice.

(Rev. Fr. Dr. Ninan V. George is serving as the General Secretary of St. Thomas Orthodox Clergy Association, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church)



REFORMULATING THE MISSION PARADIGM OF THE CHURCH IN THE EMERGING SOCIO-POLITICAL SCENARIO IN INDIA

Fr. Philip Kuruvilla

Presentation at the Global Clergy Conference, Parumala on 24th May, 2023

Introduction: Reformulating means changing, and the Orthodox Church prides itself as a ‘no-changing’ Church. But we must understand that in not changing, we are going against nature and evolution which is something that has to happen to every living organism, and the Church - and its clergy - are no exception. If we don’t evolve we have stopped growing, and we decay. Similarly, if we stop being relevant to our people, we become useless, or extinct. If we want to give our people the blueprint of a life of peace and joy in any situation - they must see it in the lives we lead, and feel it in the Qurbanas we celebrate, and in the sermons we preach - then the church and the priest becomes relevant. The organism called the MOSC needs to evolve, to reformulate, but this has to be done within the concept of the unchanging Holy Tradition in our Church.

The End of the Traditional Concept of Mission

The traditional concept of Mission as we know it has undergone a radical change, and will not work in this day and age. There was a time India’s Christians were looked upon with favour and gratitude by other religions because of our work among the poor in education and the health sector. Today that thought process is gone. Most Hindus are of the opinion that Christians are into Mission because they want to convert others. How did this happen, and when?

Confused Concept of Mission within Christianity: Let us be clear about Mission. Many Christians and non-Christians in India accept that Jesus was one of the greatest teachers or gurus ever, and his words resound in their hearts. Unfortunately, some Christian denominations have preferred taking the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20: “Therefore go and

make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, thus highlighting baptism and conversion. Many Christian denominations - mostly Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, but also many in the mainline Churches - feel that this is the crux of the Bible. The framers of the Indian Constitution allowed all religions to ‘propagate’ their faith and this helped conversion to Christianity in the new India. Over the last 20 years, however, because of the outlook of some missionaries and mission churches who feel they are following Christ’s orders regarding baptism, many churches and schools belonging to the Catholic and Mainline Protestant Churches [which are more visible], are being vandalised in different parts of India, and the priests and nuns harassed or beaten up - on the charge of conversion. The current political leadership has taken this to its heart, and this is also the reason for the Anti-Conversion Bills have been passed in 9 Indian States by 2022. Even the sainted Mother Teresa was accused by some right wingers of conversion. This may not be the belief of all our fellow countrymen and women, but it has unfortunately become the thinking of the average Hindu today. All Indian Christians need to reformulate our Mission patterns, modules and our strategies in the light of the current thinking.

The Orthodox Concept of Mission: The book

‘Martyria or Mission?’ [Ed. by Ion Bria, WCC] was the Orthodox response to the question of Mission raised in the World Council of Churches. The highlight is on the word Martyr, in ancient Greek, to mean “Witness”. Witnessing Christ in our daily lives- whatever our profession - to the point of persecution and even death. The articles in the book explain how the Orthodox do not prefer conversion, dividing geographical territory or count the



number of 'souls saved', but rather go after the one sheep that is lost. It is true that the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (MOSC) in India doesn't go after conversion, and that our parents have taught us to lead Christ-like lives, but whether it shows in our lives, is a moot question. However, this may be a clue for us to work on for new Mission Paradigm.

Reformulating Mission through Witness in the Orthodox Church:

We need to refocus on the "Witness" angle - so people see us living lives which stand out in stark and positive comparison to the lives around us. Then we can talk of a man called Jesus, his words and deeds, his message for the Universe. That message is not for a small group of Christians in a church [who are for the most part there because of their birth, not necessarily out of conviction], it is a message which falls easily upon the ears and hearts of the people of India who are used to gurus and sages and holy men and women. But, where is a truly holy Christian man - or woman - today? We priests consider our Bishops 'holy', and the Orthodox people consider us priests 'holy'. But this is relative and within a small group. Holiness should shine out of a holy person for all to see - such a person is yet to emerge in the MOSC in recent years - and that person will be our 'missionary' to India. Some among us need to become gurus- not just in the confines of the Seminary or Church- but among the people of India at large.

Reformulating Mission through Liturgy: I am now continuing to put new ideas for the Reformulation of Mission in the arena of Liturgy. I am making a submission that the MOSC has been overly leaning towards Syrian Christianity over the last 18 or 19 centuries- their culture, their language and their liturgy - and whereas they have been 'useful' for us from Kerala who are the descendants of those converted by St Thomas, and acceptable to the people in Kerala, since they have seen us for the last 2000 years, it is not understandable or appreciated by the people of other states of India - in fact it is alien. Many times - in seminary debates and in the clergy meetings outside Kerala - we have spoken of an Indian Liturgy. One reason given for not tampering with this aspect was the ongoing litigation with the Jacobite Church- but now we are free to bring in changes which are necessary for

the Church if it is to feed our sheep all over the world in the years ahead. What liturgical changes should we bring in - I leave it to the pandits in our church.

Reformulating Mission through Theology: In spite of 2000 years we have been unable to incorporate a truly pan-Indian Theology. Are our prayers and liturgies incorporating the issues of the day, or touching areas where the average Indian is hurting or affected- or are they 'outdated'? A theology that will be more understood and appreciated in an 'emerging' Bharat, couched in a language that is not of Syria, and not a culture of the Middle East, but one which blends with the spiritual ethos of an ancient India. Unfortunately we have not got any Orthodox person to take a relook at the theology of the Malankara Orthodox Church and offer it in an Indian milieu. Only Fr. Dr. V. C. Samuel has written prophesying a truly Indian Church and an Indian Theology. Our church has many theologians today, many doctorate holders, but few have dared to conceptualise a new Indian Orthodox Theology. This is necessary as we go for a Reformulation of Orthodox Mission.

Other Reasons: There are a few more reasons for reformulating our Mission Paradigms at the earliest:

Humans as a Species: The idea of humans as a species and not divided by country, caste, creed or gender has been starkly brought out by recent crises: Pandemics like COVID, Global Warming, Water Scarcity, Climate Change, Terrorism, to name a few, all show us that the new 'enemy' is not based on nationality or religion but on modernisation, greed and power-lust by humans, without heeding nature. Only by dealing unitedly against such issues [and the people who stoke them] can we hope to overcome them. This could even mean the coming together of the good people [of different religions] against the bad. Are we ready for that?

Migrations and the mono-cultural world: Whether we like it or not the evolving world is amalgamating in terms of culture and language and dress and food and admittedly, in the process, many of these will be lost. Evidently, for a better, easier life our youth are migrating to different countries. Illegal migrants trying to enter the 'milk and honey' of the USA or Europe, are willing to die on the perilous journey. On reaching their destination, they add to the culture of that place and a 'melting' takes

place. The new multi-culture becomes the norm. The MOSC cannot function as it has managed to function till now, in the 'Malankara space'. What can the faiths - including our Orthodox Church - offer to the genuine spiritual seekers which they can take with them as reference in this fast-paced, mobile world?

Scientific and Technological advancements - are the blind leading the blind?: In the field of science and technology the world is changing so fast that we faith leaders are finding it difficult to keep up, e.g. the negative effects of the ubiquitous mobile phones on our growing children. We need to be able to prepare our flock for the new world, which has got AI [Artificial Intelligence] and other futuristic creations we cannot even imagine or conceive at this stage. A world where Elon Musk is planning to 'colonise' Mars. We are being overtaken by new inventions and discoveries. How can we help our flock if we do not move to stay ahead?

The issues of 'Outside Kerala' now take on a bigger meaning in the MOSC: The disparity between the Orthodox Churches inside Kerala and outside Kerala have been my focus for a long time now. I have always maintained that we who are born and brought up outside Kerala are 'second-class citizens' in the Church simply because we speak a different language, showcase a different culture and have a different outlook and mentality to those from Kerala. When the Church's emissaries -its priests and bishops - come to the cities like Delhi or Mumbai or Kolkata or Bangalore, some of them tell us to speak in Malayalam and follow the culture of Kerala, instead of talking about Christ. We talk about MOSC being an 'autocephalus' church, when we wanted freedom from Syrian hegemony, why are we not showing the same courtesy to the Malankara Nazaranis who are born and brought up in other parts of India, and other parts of the globe? And now I predict that this problem is going to be multiplied with the exodus of Malayalis from Kerala to different parts of the brave new world out there. And we as the keepers of the faith need to grapple with the issues and offer solutions, before it is too late, and people leave because we don't seem to have solutions.

I end with 2 major proposals to solve some of these issues that I have highlighted:

The first is biblical and historical. In Acts 6:1-15, we

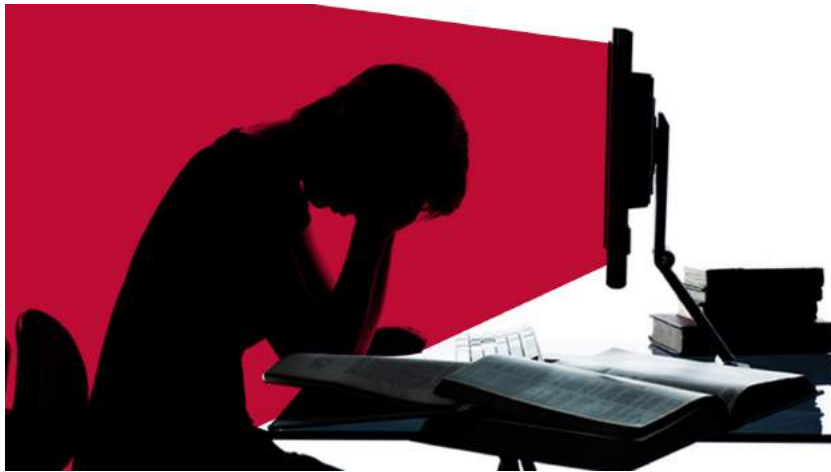
all know that there was a very similar issue of discrimination in the early church, there was a tussle between the Greek-speaking Jews [diaspora churches] and the Hebrew-speaking Jews [Kerala churches]. The early church solved it by selecting 7 deacons - including Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit - and giving to them the task of distribution, so the apostles could concentrate on preaching, teaching and healing. Can we not do the same?

Secondly, I suggest we have some follow-up meetings and the creation of Boards:

- **Creation of a Science and Tech Board :** This could study upcoming scientific and technological advances and how they will affect the faithful of our church
- **Creation of a Liturgical Review Board:** To look into changes that need to be brought in- including indigenising of the present Liturgy to make it more acceptable and appreciable in a Church which is crossing national borders.
- **Creation of a Review Board for the 2 Seminaries and the current Syllabus:** To include subjects that are essential for a priest of the Global Indian Orthodox Church of the Future
- **Creation of a Crisis Board:** Selecting a group of clergy/laity to debate the issues faced by our faithful in crisis situations and give recommendations on how to deal with them before they blow up out of proportion.

If Jesus came today would he commend those who guarded the faith zealously but kept it for themselves, or would he commend those who took his evangelion - by any acceptable means - to the wider human race through a new type of mission which does not discriminate? I am reminded that this is the Church of God where the Holy Spirit resides. I leave knowing that I have done my prophetic duty.

(Rev. Fr. Philip Kuruville was born in Kolkata. He has been a passionate spokesperson for Indian Orthodox youth born outside Kerala. With Post Graduate degrees from Oxford [MTh] and Nagpur [MSW] he was the founding Dean of STOTS [Nagpur]. He can be contacted at frpkuruville@hotmail.com)



WOMEN AND CYBERCRIME

Nina John

Our world today is dominated by the pervasive and ubiquitous technology that has connected us across communities, countries and continents - the World Wide Web or the internet. Smart phones and apps help us in many ways, from telling us the time to tracking our blood pressure and vitals. Entertainment has made its way to our bedrooms through cable TV, friends and family can be seen on Facetime on our smartphones or video on WhatsApp, while Facebook and Zoom connect us with like-minded groups across countries.

The COVID pandemic and lockdown isolated all households, confining everybody behind closed doors. The computer was one means of connection to the outer world, and many women found outlets for their poetry, cookery, even professional and academic services and also made many personal connections. But there is a dark side to all this. The computer that we have installed in the home has cameras and software that can photograph us in our most casual and intimate moments.

Some women who met 'friends' online, found the relationships taking an ugly turn. Some were fleeced of their money, with the other person borrowing huge sums of money. More worryingly, when intimate photographs or pictures were exchanged, these were later used for blackmail, or, as the law terms it, 'sextortion'. There are cases called 'phishing' where the woman's account has been hacked and large sums of money siphoned off from the bank. Any time the relationship goes sour, it is usually the male who starts with the threat of morphing pictures

and sending them to family or friends. Many young girls have succumbed to the threats, either handing over money or, in extreme cases, committing suicide. Only a few have come forward to complain to the police and as a result, they have been able to track the accounts and arrest the perpetrators.

Sexual harassment at the office has now been reported online as well and organizations are taking steps to curb this. *Cyberbullying* can consist of constant, persistent calls for meetings at odd hours, demanding sexual favours, asking for the woman to undress or reveal parts of their anatomy. Organisations have set up codes of enforcement, and complaints can result in investigation and disciplinary action. *Cyberstalking* is another crime where the perpetrator follows the victim online, posting nasty comments or threats.

The internet offers anonymity and a safe haven for anti-social elements, women being especially vulnerable to predators on the web. A woman who takes a stand or voices an unpopular opinion is at once attacked by trolls. The political parties have actually hired armies of unemployed youth to battle any ideology opposed to their stand, never refuting the arguments with data or logic, but simply spewing personal messages of hate and misogyny, with threats of rape or murder to boot. Deep fakes have been added to the arsenal, and can have completely false videos or audios to malign the individual.

One of the most popular apps is Facebook, and now one of the most popular messages is, "My account has

been hacked - please do not send money to this particular account.” More serious than just hacking the account for money, is the crime of morphing the profile onto a pornographic site, where the victim will again be harassed online. One technique to remain safe here when you receive a request is to simply check the friends you have in common; a lone male with no friends is a dead giveaway - do not accept that “friend” request. For teenagers meeting their ‘boyfriends’, never meet such people alone - always keep your best friends with you if at all you are going to meet them IRL (in real life). Many of these are traps for the unwary, and the hep teenager online, turns out to be paunchy and middle-aged. In these days of rampant substance abuse, these are also conduits for drugs and illegal substances, first befriending the victim, then blackmailing them.

Posting pictures of children and holidays just to show off has resulted in crime: “We are going to Bali for ten days!” has led to the houses being robbed. Worse, there are child predators on the web, participating in child pornography and even rape videos and child trafficking.

Post-pandemic has seen a rise in the crimes against women, though thankfully, there is now better reporting as well. Why are more women not reporting these crimes? Mainly because of fear of social stigma and lack of awareness. Before going into the legal provisions regarding Cybercrime, let’s define it: Cybercrimes are simply, “any offense or crime that involves the use of a computer, mobile or other electronic device.”

Cyber Law

Although a comprehensive regulatory framework for laws governing the cyber realm, including such crimes, has not yet been developed, some legal remedies under different statutes can help victims of cyber violence. Before 2013, there was no law that dealt directly with cyberbullying or crimes committed against women online. Sections 354A to 354D are added to the Indian Penal Code, 1860 as a result of Section 354A of the 2013 Criminal Amendment Act.

The following are covered under cyber law: Cyber Criminals, Electronic and Digital Signatures, Protection of Private and Personal Information and Intellectual Property

Suggestions for Preventing Cybercrime

Watch out for pointless or fraudulent phone-calls or email messages. Do not reply, don’t even read. Financial institutions will not ask for your passwords, so do not give these away. Similarly, do not reply random Emails that request personal information. Pay special attention to the privacy policies that are included with the software and posted on websites. A victim of cybercrime should notify the local cyber cell or a police station.

A complaint can also be submitted anonymously through the **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal**. This portal is an initiative of Government of India to facilitate victims/ complainants to report cybercrime complaints online. This portal caters to all types of cybercrime complaints including complaints pertaining to online **Child Pornography (CP)**, **Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)** or **sexually explicit content such as Rape/Gang Rape (CP/RGR)** content and other cybercrimes such as **mobile crimes, online and social media crimes, online financial frauds, ransomware, hacking, cryptocurrency crimes and online cyber trafficking**. This is a national portal, so reporting can be done, preferably in the state where the crime was committed, but has access to all other state portals. Complaints may be done anonymously, but proof of the crime such as documents, phone records, and photographs must be provided.

Women need to be aware of the dangers of the internet - it can be a wonderful bridge to the rest of the world or a plunge into an abyss of despair, desperation and damnation. As with all things in life, moderate use of technology and the internet are key - be as alert on the digital highway as when you are crossing the road of a national highway.

(Ms. Nina John, member of St. Peter’s and St. Paul’s Orthodox Church, Chennai, is a Life-Skills and Public Speaking Coach, Mentor, Motivator and Author of the Book: Navigating Corporate Seas. She established Toastmasters International in Tamil Nadu and is a Founder member of the Professional Speaker’s Association of India. She was honoured with the Bharatiya Yuva Shakthi Trust (BYST) Award for ‘Mentor of the Decade’ which was presented to her by Prince Charles and Late Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2002. (BYST, mentored by Prince Charles, was founded to support and encourage young entrepreneurs).



Silence of the Holy, Venerable Women in the Indian Orthodox Church

Bibi Kuruvilla

If there was a Golden Age of Patristic Fathers, why is there no mention of a golden age of Holy Venerable Mothers? Where is the Indian Orthodox Venerable Mother ‘who serves you by creating an opportunity to bend your ego and mend your mind? Neither a teacher nor a disciple, she should stand as the forgotten self whose presence reminds one of the eternal truth and love,’¹ which is one’s true Christly identity. But where is she?

The dictionary defines ‘matriarchy’ as a form of social organization in which the mother or oldest female is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are traced through the female line. However, most scholars do not consider all non-patriarchal systems to be matriarchal, and some argue that matriarchies are egalitarian rather than female-dominated. In Christianity, the term ‘Holy Mother Church’ is used to depict the Church as a mother in her functions of nourishing, protecting and sustaining the faithful.

There is no evidence of a holy tradition of saintly Mothers in the Indian Orthodox Church, but, there are many examples of Christian women who contributed to the development of the early churches and communities, even in the Patristic age (from the end of 1st century to the close of the 7th century). In the early Church, with the compilation of the New Testament, it became evident that Christ led a reformed and illuminated group of women to walk with Him in his journey of Faith and Love, till the Cross, and even after. The Bible is replete

with instances where St. Paul raised up women leaders in the house churches. Many women contributed to early Christianity in various ways such as preaching, teaching, hosting, witnessing, and being martyred. There are early writings purported to be written by women disciples such as the Gospel of Mary, but which have not found favour by scholars. Powerful, exemplary women like Mary Magdalene, Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe and Junia existed, and several others from historical and archaeological sources such as St. Macrina [the ascetic], St Xenia [the “fool for Christ’], Thacia, Perpetua, Marcella, etc. However, the question arises, where is the Indian example that an Indian Christian woman can follow?

Hinduism has a rich tradition of honouring and celebrating the feminine aspect of the divine known as *Shakti*. *Shakti* is the feminine creative and energetic force of the Divine whose every quality is depicted realistically as a manifested goddess, mother, consort and power. Hindu scriptures describe *Shakti* as being a motherly divine figure, whose loving, compassionate, nurturing and sometimes fiercely protective qualities are integral to both the material and spiritual growth of every being. In reality, every Christian woman aspires to be divine as that is her Godly calling e.g. the *divinisation* of St. Athanasius or the *theosis* propounded by the Cappadocian Fathers.

In this day of women’s emancipation, when female energy conquers and humanly battles the forces of evil, or introspectively involves in spiritual warfare, venerable

Christian Mothers are needed in the Church to show the way. Where are they? Such women can even be glorified as “*Stree Shakti*”, a Sanskrit term that encompasses all qualities of ‘power’, ‘energy’, ‘ability’, ‘strength’, ‘effort’, and ‘capability’. In the theology of Hinduism, Shakti is the representation of dynamic forces and are thought to move through the universe. Is this not also who the Christian Mother is? She is the cave of pure wisdom, the life in the forests, the silence of the mountains, all that forever reflects a body of living sacrifices. She is almost divine, a source of knowledge, spiritual and compassionate and should ever be seeking truth. Unfortunately, this is not what women who are active in the church hierarchy aspire to be. Spirituality and holiness are not the virtues that are sought after, but rather, administrative capability, the power to politic, and a certain diffidence towards criticism. These are hallmarks of the women today who rise in the ranks of the church and who attain positions in Church. Whither holiness?

We all accept that one should not judge by outward appearances. Yet it is the first thing that is done when a woman emerges into society to teach, preach, heal or even just live as a Christian. And both men and women are guilty of this. If we could see her as the source of life, intelligence, and creativity, she could be a beacon of spiritual awakening for all beings, especially for women. Unfortunately we always talk of venerable Christian Fathers - without any mention of Mothers, even in a *Keralam* which was matrilineal till few centuries ago. Where are these holy Mothers in the Indian Orthodox Church? In my discussions with a few theologians in our Church, and a reading of theology, I found that there is mention of saintly women in other Orthodox Traditions, but rarely in the MOSC. Are there no holy Christian women in India? Is it that they don't exist or that they are measured by a different yardstick?

What is the criteria for measuring the holiness of a woman? If we look at nuns in the Orthodox convents, we will note that they are unfortunately not considered to be consecrated on par with deacons or priests, nor are they given positions in the Church.

They are not even considered worthy of any special hymns of holiness - even in death -except the ‘*makkalil appan*’ quqlion which is for all laity. After living 3 or 4

or 5 decades in the spiritual confines of the convent, praying and in solitude, giving up a life of marriage and motherhood for their Lord, not many in the Church consider them venerable and holy - though in the history of the Convents themselves there is mention of holy and venerable sisters in the past. These women have given up much more than the male priest, yet they are not considered to be at the same level. Is this fair? Is this what Christ expects from His Church after 2000 years? Sainly bishops in the past have encouraged saintly women in the convents - this is not the case anymore. And none can be found among the laity, other than the women in positions of administration of spiritual organisations. Whither holiness?

The clock is ticking. Moments are exploding into the bustle of contemporary life, challenged by a world of frenetic activity which is moving towards chaos. Untruth and Darkness reign. The Environment is ravaged. The elements that make us holy have been drained of existential reality. It is time for the ‘Mother’ to emerge in the Church, dwelling deep in her own heart, fed by the wisdom of the living waters, untouched by the glamour of the world, but touched by His presence, experiencing the most powerful Christ who lives. A mother who thus becomes the light that dispels the deepest darkness around..... gentle as the breeze yet fiercely just and righteous within..... that holy and venerable mother has to be found.

Where are the holy women? Where are the venerable Mothers? How do we overcome the deafening silence we hear?

¹Quote from Ma Achunthya

(Mrs. Bibi Kuruvilla was the Secretary to the Women's Desk of the MGOCSM, Kottayam, from 1992-1994. and Associate Secretary to the MGOCSM Diaspora Secretariat, in Nagpur, from 2006-2010. She taught English in STOTS, Nagpur for many years, ever since its inception in Bhilai in 1995. She is an International Youth Mentor for Germans in India, and Founder Trustee of The Untouchables, an NGO, registered in Bangalore. She is currently on an assignment in the Gregorian Community, Roha. She can be reached at bbkrvll@gmail.com.)



THE GREGORIAN COMMUNITY: COME BE A PART OF IT

Susan Jacob

Come be a part of us!! What a wholehearted, warm and inclusive welcome to *come and be part of the Gregorian community!* The *Come and See* and *be a part of the Gregorian community* invitation was accepted by me early this month and the least that I could say was that I was overwhelmed !!! I came and saw, and realized that it is indeed good and true, beautiful and full of promise! From deep within me there was this invisible gravitational pull that urged me to be part of this simple community life, to be silent and breathe in the peace and tranquility. The stillness and quietude by the riverside refreshed and restored my weary soul, bringing me closer to the creator, our loving God whose benevolence made these things come to pass!

That evening, *Sandhya Namaskaaram* had a new meaning for me, kindling in me a sense of wonder and admiration for the great visionary who envisaged something so precious, beautiful and spiritual, spending a lot of his time and energy and a considerable part of his life in pursuit of his dream. A dream of creating 'a caring, sharing and loving community rooted in the love of God and having a zest for serving its neighbors'.

Hailed as the first Orthodox monastery of its kind outside Kerala, the Gregorian community is the brain-child and dream project of His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Coorilose, Metropolitan of the Bombay Diocese. Throughout his religious studies and his work in India and abroad as an Orthodox priest, he was inspired with the idea of building a community, which was perhaps further strengthened by his ties with the TAIZE Community in France and the IONA Community in Scotland. In rare

moments when he would open up and share his dreams and visions, he spoke on how the idea of a community was conceptualized.

A Community of the Youth in the Church

His Grace's first and foremost priority was the Youth of the church.

"I have been associated with the MGOCSM for a long time. Perhaps spurred by my stint with MGOCSM, I wanted to help build a community for the youth of the Church, where the young people could come and spend time away from routine, away from the mundane, in a life of prayer, worship and meditation, a time away in silent self-examination and soul searching." HG Geevarghese Mar Coorilose

Thirumeni's close association and work with young people while he was in charge of the Mar Gregorios Orthodox Students Movement and as Vicar in parishes in UK and India, made him conscious of the tremendous stress young people go through in their student life, and in jobs that demand their attention 24x7. Medical problems like early heart disease, hypertension; and also socio-psychological issues like divorces, depression, suicides in young people all seemed to be pointing to the need for such a place for the youth to go to and find comfort. H.G. hoped that this community will one day be able to provide the youth with a 'go to place' when they feel depressed with the cares of modern life, to spend time away from routine, 'focusing inwards and towards God'.

An International Centre for Ecumenical Dialogue

Being a theologian and an academic actively involved in the ecumenical field, Thirumeni wished that this will become a place for ecumenical study, debates, and di-

dialogue among different denominations and world religions. In his own words *“With the different Christian denominations active in Kerala and India, with constant tensions between the two Orthodox factions, there is the need for dialogue, discussions and understanding of each other’s perspectives. With our background in the ecumenical field, our vision of the Gregorian Community expanded to forming an International Centre for Ecumenical Dialogue, where inter-denominational dialogue, ecumenical conferences and seminars could be held; and Christian learning, inter faith study and dialogue could be initiated”*.



A Place Where God’s Love Is Abundantly Visible

The Hindu-Muslim riots of 1993 in Mumbai left a huge impression on Thirumeni. He said that he had taken special permission during the riot times to travel in Mumbai to watch the impact first hand. *“I was devastated on seeing the insane bloodshed and killings by either side. I nurtured the idea of forming the Gregorian community as a community that included all, Christians as well as others, to share, love and to grow in the love of God.”*

Thirumeni was certain that Inter-faith dialogue and discussion, would give space for people of different faiths to come together and share their experiences and listen to each other’s perspective, thus making peace efforts that pave the way towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Such communities where God’s love is visible in abundance would be pleasing to God and a blessing to humankind. True to His calling, the Gregorian community has under its caring shelter, people of various faiths and denominations.

He was also quite concerned about the elderly in the parishes who were sick and lonely and had no one to turn to for companionship and support. He envisioned a society where there would be volunteers and skilled

people to look after the elderly. He said that it was easier for a group of people or volunteers to help the aged and the differently abled.

Location Hunting for the Community- Roha the chosen place

“With these thoughts in mind, I came to Roha near Mumbai. The serenity and the tranquility of the hills and valleys, its streams and rivers attracted me. It is a picturesque area blessed with natural richness and lined with different resorts and travel spots. Alibaug which is a famous tourist spot is not far from here.” H G Mar Coorilose

Thirumeni, along with a dedicated team from the Bombay Diocese went scouting for a suitable piece of land to fulfil all that Thirumeni had in mind, and underwent many strenuous ordeals of climbing up and down numerous hills over a period of time, looking for a proper setting for the Gregorian Community as per God’s will. Finally 55 acres of land was purchased in 1997 at Aare Budruk, Roha and 23 acres at Kila, Roha was added in the year 2003. Fr. Abraham Joseph and Mr. R T. Thomas who worked closely with Thirumeni from the very beginning, were part of the team. The problems with water availability in the hill came to surface only later, but in the meantime, 23 acres of land was already purchased in the valley where, by God’s grace, water is in plenty. Picturesque and beautiful, the property was sandwiched between the gently flowing Kundaliki River and a Highway, giving immense pleasure to visitors to the community.

Surging Forward

Named after St. Gregorios of Parumala and popularly known as the Gregorian Community, Roha, this idyllic place is located in Killa, Roha Taluk, Raigad District, about 120 kilometers from Mumbai, on the route to Goa. The Community, which is a project of the Bombay Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, was registered as a Society in 2000, under the Societies Act of 1860, and later, in 2001, as a Charitable Trust under the Bombay Public Trust Act 1950. It is a part of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church headed by the Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan, who is also the Patron of the Community. H.G. Geevarghese Mar Coorilose is the President of the Gregorian Community.

The stated Mission is ‘to promote the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual well-being of the people irrespective of class, creed and language; to advocate education to the Society with love, compassion and integrity; to cater to the needs of the intellectually disabled children by providing them quality education; to manage, encourage, promote agriculture, farming and animal husbandry; to work towards the social empowerment of the needy and downtrodden by providing them livelihood and by encouraging them towards sustainable growth.

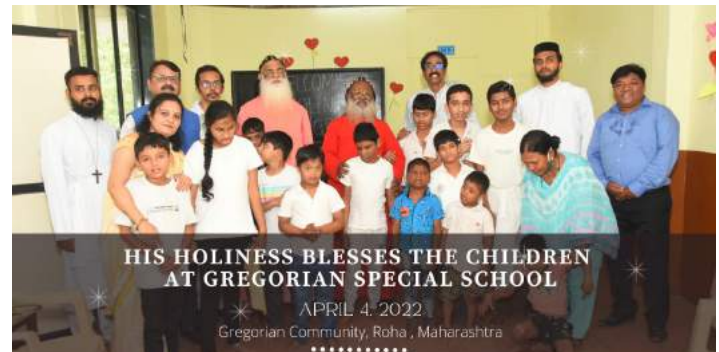
Slowly and steadily, the dream of His Grace started taking shape. A simple church named St, Gregorios Church was built on the Gregorian Hill and another chapel named St Thomas Chapel was built in the valley, also called the riverside land. The Gregorian Shelter Home was inaugurated in 2006; the Gregorian Public School commenced in 2007. St. Thomas Village Mission, initiated in 2018 helped the people of the villages nearby. A Gregorian Local Prayer Mission under the same genre, was initiated for the local inmates and the community to come together in prayer and fellowship twice a week, to build bonds of unity and love. The most commendable project by the Gregorian Community is the Gregorian Special School that started functioning from 1st October 2019. The establishment of a Gregorian Library, organising Gregorian Retreats and Conferences, Gregorian Summer Camps, Gregorian Bible Study series around the year and some programs annually like the Gregorian Hill Pilgrimage, were in keeping with the vision of initiating spiritual growth, study and dialogue among people, especially youngsters.

In its endeavour to encourage, promote agriculture, farming and animal husbandry (Mission Statement) and manage a sustainable agricultural system, the community has encouraged an Integrated Farming System that integrates livestock, crop production, fish, poultry, trees, vegetable gardens and orchards and other systems that benefit each other. Around 9 modules of land are under cultivation, and the yield is sufficient for their own consumption and leaving a bit more for sales. They are blessed with a variety of vegetables and fruits. Well maintained gardens with beautiful and exotic flowers reflected the beauty and marvel of God’s creation!

Special mention is made here of some of the most

vibrant and successful projects of the Gregorian Community:

The Gregorian Public School established in 2007 in keeping with its mission to advocate education to the Society with love, compassion and integrity (Mission Statement) contributed immensely in integrating with the local population. The school was instrumental in educating the children of the local community, enabling them to grow up as good and responsible citizens, who would eventually serve the country and contribute sincerely to nation- building.



It will be appropriate to mention here, that starting a school in this area was not an easy task but was fraught with opposition, political pressure, and other problems. Thirumeni firmly believes that it is only by God’s grace that they surmounted the problems. He was also happy that after much trouble and ‘heart ache’ they received a ‘No Objection Certificate’ from the government, to use the land for educational purposes. It is a matter of great pride that the Public school which is affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, has made tremendous progress in the last 16 years. With a strength of 1000 plus students from Nursery to Std. X, and about 59 teaching and non-teaching staff, the school has already sent 3 batches for the Board Exams as on June 2019. It is extremely heart-warming to note that the school achieved cent per cent results, with students scoring 100% in important subjects all these years. The school was led and managed by capable and efficient Principals Ms. Salamma James, Suma Sam and currently by Ms. Raymol Varghese; ably assisted by Fr. Alin Joseph Alex as Vice-Principal and Treasurer of the community.

The school is well equipped with laboratories for Computers and other science subjects; indoor and outdoor activities; school festivals and other extra-curricular activ-

ities at the local, state and national levels. In Thirumeni's words "As I witnessed the preparations and presentations by the children, parents and teachers during their Annual day function, I could sense how the Church in this area was reaching out, connecting with and serving the local population, through this school. I could also sense how the local population was responding to the efforts of the school with much enthusiasm, gratitude and hope for their children. Thank God for the school and its mission."

Gregorian Special School

The Gregorian Special School was a long cherished dream and a result of the special and sustained efforts of H.G. Mar Coorilose. This was blessed and inaugurated by him in 2019 to cater to the needs of the intellectually disabled children by providing them quality education (Mission Statement); to help them to be socially integrated and function as independent adults.

The Gregorian Special School continues to provide hope and inspiration for the families of 15 such children. The School has been trying to transform the lives of these children by providing them special professional educators, occupational therapy materials, and all possible self - help improvisation techniques. By 2022, the special care and efforts by the teachers and their assistants resulted in 6/10 children improving their ability in academics and basic self-behaviour. It is hoped that more children will soon be part of this project.

Facilities & Services provided at Gregorian Special School include two qualified staff for special education; classrooms with special benches, chairs and wheel chairs; creation of a toy room with around 50 toys, games, and sports equipment specially designed for special children and Transportation facility to pick the children from home and drop them back. Digital Individualized Educational Programme (IEP) to understand the development plan on the basis of children IQ level was provided under the Individualized Education program. Parents' Workshops & Training sessions on managing the behavioral problems are also conducted from time to time.

The Special School is one of the best and noble initiatives taken up by the Gregorian Community. Working with the children who are slow learners requires patience and skill and a genuine love for children of special needs.



The school actively and meaningfully engages the children during the school hours which alleviates the pressure on parents for at least part of the day. As they try relentlessly to train them to be independent individuals, it gives the parents hope for a better future for their children. May God bless the teachers and the helpers and all the special trainers, the designers who design the special toys and kits, and Thirumeni's vision in envisaging an honourable and compassionate project such as this.

The Gregorian community has over the years successfully implemented a series of important projects which need more space to document. Yet the good news is that there are more projects pending to be initiated and more dreams to be fulfilled. "For all this to happen the night is still very long, the path ahead is still unknown, and many miles still to go, before we can rest." Says H.G. Mar Coorilose.

We are sure that God will show us the way Thirumeni. Let us rejoice in the abundance of his mercy.

[There are more initiatives and projects that have to be documented and described, especially Thirumeni's pet project of establishing a Monastery. However due to lack of space, the rest of this paper will be published in the next quarterly.]

(Mrs. Susan Jacob, Sr. Audit Officer (Retd.) and former Coordinator for Communications, Church and Ecumenical Relations at the Christian Conference of Asia, is a member of the St. Peter's and St. Paul's Orthodox Church, Chennai)

The Malankara Sabha English Quarterly will be featuring a series of articles highlighting the Mission Centers, Monasteries and Convents of the Malankara Orthodox Church. This article on Gregorian Community, Roha, is the fourth of the series.

Orthodox Global Online Sunday School (OGOSS) – Update

Thomas Simon

For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself – Acts 2:39

“Wherever you go, the Church will follow you.” This is the statement that our most beloved Bava Thirumeni, H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, made during one of the meetings with Church officials a few months ago. We are glad to share that the Orthodox Syrian Sunday School Association of the East (OSSAE) rose to this spiritual call.



Under the direction of Bava Thirumeni, OSSAE laid the foundation of the “Orthodox Global Online Sunday

School” - a unique initiative of the Church to reach out to her children who are scattered across the world, bringing them together on one platform. This remarkable global project across various time zones, age groups and technological platforms, is probably the first of its kind among churches of all denominations in India and abroad.

Over the past two decades, it has been observed that many of our people are migrating to newer cities and countries where the Church does not have sufficient members to form a parish. As a result, these families are detached from active Church life causing younger generations to miss out on Orthodox faith formation that upholds the values of our holy traditions. Hence it was important that the Church addressed this need by using the available technology and resources.

Following Bava Thirumeni’s Kalpana dated 7th January 2023, Fr. Dr. Varghese Varghese, Director General of OSSAE, constituted a Global Online Sunday school project team comprising Prof. Dr. Cherian Thomas (India), Mr. Thomas Simon (Dubai) & Mr. Sherry Jacob Kurian (Kuwait) as Project Coordinators. Subsequently, on 12th February 2023, the *Orthodox Global Online Sunday School (OGOSS)* was officially launched by H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III.

Within 3 months of its launch, we were amazingly blessed to have a team of 65+ highly experienced and committed Sunday school teachers spread across the world, teaching over 600+ students in 40 online classes across different time zones. The current schedule is as listed:

- 10:00 am IST on Saturdays for children from Australia & New Zealand
- 10:00 pm IST on Saturdays for children from Europe, UK, Ireland, USA, Canada & GCC.
- 05:00 pm IST on Sundays for children from Far East, India, UAE & Africa.



- 08.30 pm IST on Saturdays – an exclusive batch for senior members (21 years & above) for Grade X certification & Veda Praveen Diploma (Grade XI & XII) online one-year courses

We currently have students from the following countries across all the 5 continents from Japan on the East to US on the West and Nordic countries in Europe from the North to Oceania in South:

- Europe – Belgium, Norway, Sweden, France, Malta, Spain, Netherlands, Germany, Armenia, United Kingdom & Ireland
- North America- United States of America, Canada,
- Middle East – Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE
- Africa – Kenya, Nigeria & South Africa
- Far East – Japan, Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia
- Oceania – Australia & New Zealand
- India – Andamans, Nagaland, Punjab, Haridwar, Allahabad, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Telangana, Pondicherry, Chhattisgarh, remote parts from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nādu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh &

Kerala

We like to mention few of the reasons for which over 600+ students decided to join the Global Online Sunday school, and these genuine needs of our flock highlights the importance of this noble mission of our Church:

- “Our nearest parish is over 400+ kms away” – Parent from Australia
- “We take a one-hour flight to attend Holy Qurbana once in few months” – Parent who is working as a doctor in a military hospital in Saudi Arabia.
- “We do not have a church in our country” – Parents from Kenya, Japan, Iraq, Spain, Japan, Indonesia, Brunei, Armenia.
- “Both of us are working on Fridays and our children are too young to travel alone to attend Sunday school” – Parent in the Middle East.
- “I have completed Grade XI (in SS) and I want to complete Grade XII” – 1st year medical student in Armenia.
- “My son has a spinal problem hence is unable to move out of the house” – Parent from GCC. We currently have 4 differently-abled children attending our Sunday School.

- “I lost my job, and we moved out of the city to a remote place” – Father in GCC
- “It’s my dream to become a Sunday School teacher but I have not completed my Grade XI & XII (in SS)” – 35 year old nurse from Saudi who is now part of our Senior’s Batch
- “We take a 3-hour flight to Auckland (NZ) to attend Holy Qurbana once in 3 months” – Parent in New Zealand.
- We have children from Konkani congregation attending our Global Sunday School.

The youngest student at OGOSS is 3 years old and the senior most student (in the Senior’s batch) is 67 years old. We also have two students from Europe who do not know English or Malayalam – their respective parents along with the Grade 1 teacher, are jointly teaching the children in their local European languages.

It is truly a delight to experience the coming together of all our children as one Body of Christ on one platform learning our True Faith and Holy Traditions and observe the true bonding, breaking all physical barriers of distance and time. This was on splendid display on Catholicate Day this year (26 March 2023), when we witnessed our children from across the world, taking the Catholicate Day Pledge, during our online common assembly class.

Another key aspect of Orthodox Global Online Sunday School is the process of assessing the academic progress of its students. During the pandemic, OSSAE built an exclusive app for the purpose, and has been successfully conducting online examinations for over 150,000 students in the past two years. Recently we also concluded a seven-month pilot program of teaching our young students who are currently pursuing higher education in Medical, Legal & other doctoral programs. We had Orthodox students from Georgia, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Azerbaijan & Brunei completing their Grade X certification & Veda Praveen Diploma course (Grade XI & XII) successfully on 28 May 2023. All these students were assessed on our exclusive OSSAE Exam App – which is probably ‘one of its kind’ among churches in India or abroad.

On Sunday School Day (21 May 2023), OGOSS launched its social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram & YouTube. One of the key reasons to be on social

Facebook:

Orthodox Global Online Sunday School

Instagram:

orthodoxonlinesundaySchool

YouTube:

OrthodoxOnlineSundaySchool

media is to identify and reach out to more Orthodox families who are living far away from our places of worship and from our Sunday Schools.

The social media accounts are as follows:

Facebook: Orthodox Global Online Sunday School

Instagram: orthodoxonlinesundaySchool & **YouTube:** OrthodoxOnlineSundaySchool

We are deeply grateful to H.G. Dr. Joseph Mar Dionysius Metropolitan, President of OSSAE and H.G. Alexios Mar Eusebius Metropolitan for their guidance and encouragement. We also appreciate the efforts taken by all the OSSAE officials for their selfless commitment to make this initiative fruitful for our dear children. It is indeed God’s providence that the post - Covid era presents a unique opportunity in the history of our Church, especially for OSSAE, to reach out to every child of our Church and help them learn our true faith and holy traditions taking advantage of the current technological advancements. We urge the parents who live in remote places from our parishes, to utilize this wonderful initiative of the church.

Let us commit ourselves to ministering to the next generation and not miss a single child of our church in this noble endeavour.

For further details, please reach out to OGOSS Helpdesk WhatsApp # 00965-69905111.

‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?’ – St. Luke 15:4

(Mr. Thomas Simon, a Sunday School teacher of St. Thomas Orthodox Cathedral, Dubai is the Coordinator for the Orthodox Global Online Sunday School (OGOSS). He is also the co-ordinator for “Shaphiro Initiative”, a ministry of our church which reaches out to connect with families with special needs children through online from across the world. Thomas is Director of a MNC Bank and he is based in Dubai)

NEWS SECTION

Malankara Sabha commemorates 1950th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of St. Thomas



Malankara Orthodox Church organized Mar Thoma Smrithi Sangamam in Chennai on July 2, 2023, to commemorate the 1950th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Thomas, the apostle of India. The meeting presided over by H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, was inaugurated by Shri M. Appavu, Speaker of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. In his presidential address, H.H. highlighted the glorious legacy of St. Thomas who laid the foundation of the Church in India, the indigenous and autocephalous character of the Malankara Orthodox Church, and Church's significant contribution to the national upliftment and social and

religious harmony. Mr. Peter Alphonse, Chairman, Tamil Nadu Minorities Commission, H.G. Geevarghese Mar Philexenos, Metropolitan, Madras Diocese, HG Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros, Metropolitan, Kottayam Diocese, Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil, Priest Trustee, Mr. Ronnie Varghese, Lay Trustee and Adv. Biju Oommen, Association Secretary, Rev. Nainu Chandy, Marthoma Church Diocesan Secretary, and Fr. Thomas Isaac, Madras Diocesan Secretary spoke on the occasion. HH Catholicos celebrated Holy Qurbana at Santhome Cathedral, Mylapore on July 3rd.

His Holiness' Meets the Honorable President and Prime Minister of India



His Holiness, the Catholicos Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, visited the Honorable President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu and the Honorable Prime Minister of India, Sri. Narendra Modi. Union Minister V. Muralidharan and the Malankara Association Secretary Adv. Biju Oommen were also present.

In Solidarity with the victims of the Manipur Violence

The State of Manipur, located in the North East part of India, bordering the states of Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland in India and Myanmar on the east, has been affected by large scale violence between tribal communities through the last 50 days. The communal violence erupted in various districts of Manipur including Churachandpur, Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Tengnoupal and Kangpokpi, displacing thousands of people, including women and children, from their homes. Worship places, mostly churches have been burnt in various places. With the spread of violence since then, many tribal communities in Manipur were affected, causing large scale displacement. Relief camps were opened in all the affected districts of Churachandpur, Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Tengnoupal, Chandel and Kangpokpi

Consequently the Supreme Head of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, **H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III**, expressed his solidarity with the victims of the Manipur ferocity, through the popular print media of the state. His Holiness highlighted the significance of the Indian Constitution and the celebration of secularism in it and added further that the state government is supposed to make serious intervention to assure peace and tranquility among the people in Manipur, irrespective of caste, religion or tribe. **H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros** (Metropolitan Bishop of Kottayam, MOSC) in a public meeting held at Gandhi Square Kottayam, emphasized that India is a land of Non-violence and that the massacre in Manipur goes against the ethos and practice of the land. He further went on to say that the Manipur violence which erupted as ethnic clashes seems to be having political shades of hatred and discrimination. In yet another public meeting **H.G. Geevarghese Mar Pachomios** (Metropolitan Bishop of Malabar, MOSC) while expressing his solidarity with the victims of Manipur Violence, was quite vocal in criticizing the growing polarisation and politics of religious

hatred a larger picture of which is now reflected in Manipur. He went to the extent of saying that it is vain to claim 100% literacy in the state if we are not speaking against the cruelty that is befalling the people of Manipur.

Surrounded by these disturbing realities, the **Christian Service Agency (CSA)**, Nagpur, (Service wing of NCCI) called for support to engage in relief work towards the displaced people in Manipur. With the limited support that came in through a few donors, the CSA was able to reach out to the displaced communities in Imphal (East) and Kangpokpi districts in May 2023, through various local agencies and with the help of security forces working on the ground to provide relief to the affected. As the needs are at an alarming scale, the CSA intends to reach out to 1000 families this month, struggling in relief camps and other places in Manipur. Each kit, costing Rs. 6000/-, will include 2 mattresses, 2 mosquito nets, sanitary pads, huggies, milk powder and dry ration for a month. The service wing is requesting our prayerful and generous contribution to reach out to as many as possible. Please find the account details for sending your contribution:

CHRISTIAN SERVICE AGENCY

A/C NO: 496984179

IFSC Code: IDIB000N007

Bank: INDIAN BANK,

Branch: Shivaji Nagar, Nagpur

All payments need to be confirmed by email to projects@csaindia.org mentioning name and contact details, so that the agency can respond with a receipt.

Fr Thomas Ninan, an ordained Priest of the Malankara Orthodox Church, from the Diocese of Delhi, representing the MOSC in the NCCI as staff since 2016, is serving as the Executive Secretary - Manipur Project, Christian Service Agency, Nagpur, which is the service wing of the NCCI. Mob. 8510004544.

Church Must Support the Marginalized: His Holiness



Kolencherry: His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the East reiterated here today that the church has got the responsibility to support the poor and destitute in the society irrespective of caste and creed considerations. His Holiness was speaking at the inaugural meeting of the marriage assistance distribution program of the Malankara Orthodox Church at St. Peters and St Paul's Orthodox Church here. The Holy Father said that the Kingdom of Heaven will become a reality when we take care of the poor and the needy. All should have the willingness for this great duty. His Holiness exhorted all faithful of the church to voluntarily come

forward to bring the disadvantaged people around us to the frontlines of mainstream society. His Grace Yuhanon Mar Polycarpus Metrópolitan, President of the Marriage Assistance Foundation presided over the meeting. Lay Trustee Ronnie Varghese Abraham, Malankara Association Secretary Adv. Biju Oommen, Fr. Jose Thomas, Fr. Jacob Kurian and several Managing Committee Members offered felicitations.

NCCI National Assembly 21-24 April 2023, Hyderabad



H.G. Geevarghese Mar Yulios
NCCI President

The 29th General Assembly of NCCI was held at Henry Martyn Institute, Hyderabad from 21- 24 April 2023. The theme for the General Assembly was ‘The Hour Has Come: Let’s Get Going...’ The anguish that Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the spectre of death approaching him reflects the hour in which the churches in India find themselves. NCCI is an ecumenical expression of Protestant and Orthodox Churches in India as well as the ecumenical organizations, councils and agencies in the country. It was established as the National Missionary Council of India, affiliated to the International Missionary Council in 1914. It was in 1979, the council transformed itself into the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). NCCI office is based in Nagpur, Maharashtra.

It is this council which facilitates and strengthens ecumenical bonds among the Churches in India by affirming solidarity with the social, economic, and political initiatives of the communities such as Dalit, Tribal, Women, Children and Youth. The organization takes up the concerns of Migrants, Persons with Disabilities, different sexual orientations, religious and linguistic minorities with deep concern. H.G. Dr. Alexios Mar Eusebius, Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios, Fr. Thomas Oommen, Fr. Zachariah Thomas, Fr. Jeo Joseph, Fr. Marrvin Disilva, Dr. Jaisy Karingatil, Ms. Minto Mariam Varghese, Ms. Sheenu Varghese, Ms. Reni Anna Philip, Ms. Anna Thomas, Shanol Crasta, Rinto Rajan, Mr, Mammen Joseph, Mr. Sabin Baby, and Mr. Jogy Thomas, represented the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church at the General Assembly.

H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios, Bishop of Kunnamkulam Diocese, was elected as the President, NCCI. His Grace is the Vice President of Ecumenical Relations Department and President of Orthodox Christian Youth Meeting (OCYM). Fr. Jeo Joseph was elected as Executive Committee Member representing the Orthodox Church in the Executive Committee of the NCCI. He is a member of Mar Baselios Dayara, Njaliyakuzhy and Committee member of Ecumenical Relations Department. Dr Jaisy Karingatil was elected as Executive Committee Member representing the Orthodox Church in the Executive Committee of the NCCI. She is the Vice-Principal of CSI Law College and Committee member of Ecumenical Relations Department.



Rev. Fr. Jeo Joseph
Exe. Committee Member



Dr. Jaisy Karingatil
Exe. Committee Member

Historical Episcopal Visit to Sri Lanka



As a part of the Sri Lankan Mission under the auspices of the Madras Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Bishops, His Grace Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros, Metropolitan of the Kottayam Diocese and His Grace Geevarghese Mar Philexinos, Metropolitan of the Madras Diocese travelled to Sri Lanka on a historic three-day visit.

This occasion marked the first Episcopal visit and celebration of Holy Qurbana in Southern Sri Lanka, years after the late lamented Bishop, His Grace Alvares Mar Julios left Sri Lanka. The Bishops visited Mr. Vinod K. Jacob, Indian Deputy High Commissioner of Sri Lanka and on behalf of the Malankara Orthodox Church, offered congratulations on his new

appointment as the Ambassador to Bahrain.

The Holy Fathers visited and offered Holy Qurbana at various Churches in Sri Lanka, including, Mannar Parapankandal St. Mary’s Church, which was a parish at the time of the late lamented Bishop Alvares Mar Julios. They also visited the newly formed Muthalakuthi St.Mary’s congregation under the Sri Lankan Mission, as well as Kilinochi Jayapuram St. Thomas Church. The Bishops laid the foundation stone for the new Church building in Jayapuram. This historic visit and all allied programs were organized under the leadership of Mission Director Fr. Linu Lukose, Mr. Biju Alexander and Mr. Saju Samuel.

H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios elected Chair, Personnel Committee, CASA West Zone

His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios Metropolitan has been elected Chairperson of the Personnel Committee of CASA West Zone, at a meeting of the Churches Auxiliary for Social Action (West Zone).

During the meeting, the Director of CASA, Dr. Sushant Agarwal along with Regional Secretary K.V. Thomas and the Board Members congratulated His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios on his election as President of National Council of Churches in India; and Chairperson of the Christian Service Agency. In addition, His Grace currently holds the positions of Metropolitan of the Kunnankulam Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church and President of the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement (OCYM). The tenure of his position as the Chairperson of the Personnel Committee, CASA West Zone is for four years. Founded in 1947, CASA is a non-religious Indian development organization based in New Delhi and is a service wing of the National Council of Churches in India.

World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee Meeting



H.G. Abraham Mar
Stephanos Metropolitan



Rev. Fr. Dr. Reji Mathew



Ms. Lisa Rajan



Ms. Ruth Mathen

The Central Committee Meeting of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was held from 21-27 June 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland. Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nicholovos, who is also a Central Committee member, represented the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, at this first full meeting following XI Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, Germany in 2022.

During its high level deliberations, elections for Commissions and Joint Consultative Boards of this large ecumenical body also took place. Four members of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church were elected to the commissions and boards as follows: Metropolitan Abraham Mar Stephanos, Commission on Faith & Order; Rev. Fr. Dr. Reji Mathew, Commission on World Mission & Evangelism; Ms. Lisa Rajan, Commission of Young People on the Ecumenical Movement and the Commission on Education & Ecumenical Formation; and Ms. Ruth Mathen, Youth Advisor to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. This is the first time in the history of Malankara Church that two young women have been elected to the commissions of the WCC.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 500 million Christians including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church is one of the founding members of the WCC.

Malankara Prayer Meeting Association Anniversary



His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III Catholicos inaugurated the Malankara Prayer Meeting Association Anniversary Meeting held at St. George Orthodox Valiyapally, Puthupally. During the meeting His Holiness remarked that Prayer meetings should emphasize important goals of life along with equipping the believer with necessary tools for reaching such goals. The President of the Prayer Meeting Association, His Grace Mathews Mar Theodosios was the Chairman of the meeting. Other distinguished speakers at the meeting included Priest trustee Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil; Vice President Fr. Biju Mathew Prakkanam; Lay trustee Ronnie Varghese, General Secretary Fr. Mathai Kunnil; Treasurer, Mr. P.S. George; Fr. Varghese Jacob; Vicar: Fr. Dr. Varghese Varghese Kalloor and Secretary Sanaji George.

Truth Based Peace Must Emerge: Bava Thirumeni



church wants is abiding peace based on justice and truth.

Mulamthuruthi: ‘The Malankara Church stands for truth based peace’, emphasized His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, in his speech at the inauguration of the Catholicate Day celebrations and the launching of the Navathi (Ninetyeth year) celebrations of the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement (OCYM), at Marthoman Church, Mulamthuruthi. The Holy Father added that nobody in the church is against the idea of peace. However this doesn’t mean that the church is ready to accept any makeshift peace arrangement. What the

His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios, President of the Orthodox Christian Youth Movement presided over the inaugural session. Priest Trustee Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil, Lay Trustee Ronnie Varghese Abraham, Association Secretary Adv. Biju Oommen, OCYM Vice President Fr. Shiji Koshy, General Secretary Fr. Viju Elias. Marthoman Church Vicar Fr James Varghese and Mr. Pearl Kanneth spoke on the occasion. The meeting was followed by the Catholicate day Solidarity Declaration Procession.

First Malankara Orthodox Church on the African Continent



The Consecration of St. Thomas Orthodox Church in Johannesburg, South Africa, with the distinction of being the first Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in the African Continent, was held on 11&12 February 2023. The former Metropolitan of the UK-Europe & Africa Diocese, H.G. Mathews Mar Thimothios, along with the current Metropolitan, H.G. Abraham Mar Stephanos, led the Consecration services. Former Vicars of the Parish and Clergy from various other Churches, including the Coptic, Greek, Serbian, Romanian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches participated in the services. The current Vicar of the Parish, Fr. Stanley David James, Trustee Mr. M.M. Varghese and Secretary Mr. K.J. Koshy hosted and coordinated the entire program.

Advocate Joseph John elected as YMCA National Arbitrator and National Project Committee Chairman



Advocate Joseph John has been elected as the Y.M.C.A National Arbitrator and National Project Committee Chairman. He currently serves as a member of the Malankara Orthodox Church Managing Committee, Chairman of the Kerala State Lawyers Congress and as Chairman of the Y.M.C.A. Asia and Pacific Alliance Committee.

International Teenager’s Camp for Orthodox Leadership Training: Teen-Colt 2023

This 31-year-old Christian Leadership Training Camp for Young Orthodox studying in the Gulf Countries [and for others born and brought up outside Kerala], will be conducted in English. For 3 days, about 25+ young Indian Orthodox Teenagers [aged 15-19] from all over the world will live together in St Baselious Dayara, Njaiakuzhy, near Kottayam and learn about Christian Leadership, about Christ and His body, the mother Orthodox Church. This will be done through interactive sessions by Church Leaders, interspersed with outdoor visits by coach on a ‘pilgrimage’ – with a fun-filled but deep spiritual camaraderie - as they discover themselves, their relationship with God, and learn how to achieve their highest potential. This year’s TEEN-COLT is from August 3- 6, 2023. For more details please contact Fr. Philip Kuruvilla: E- Mail : frpkuruvilla@hotmail.com and Whatsapp: +91-9823152313

Second Commemoration of
CATHOLICOS BASELIOS MARTHOMA PAULOSE II
of blessed memory

12 JULY 2023

